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LICENCE TO GRILL
Balcony BBQs hit a snag

TESTS
- Eskies
- Fitness trackers
- Juicers
- Enzyme cleaners
- Stick vacs
- Smartphones
- Soundbars
- Headphones
- Tyres
- LED light bulbs

ESPECIALLY FOR YOU
The best (and worst) gift cards

ABOUT FACE
Are natural cosmetics better?

Christmas crackers
We put the classic mince pie through its paces

Travel troubles?

From flight cancellations to more serious failings, we're focusing on travellers' rights

Imagine if you paid thousands of dollars and travelled halfway around the world for an experience, only to find that the provider decided to cancel it at the last minute. Even better, imagine if the service provider did the same thing to thousands of other people on the same day.

That's what Qantas did in 2011, when it grounded its entire fleet in the context of an industrial dispute. That was an extraordinary event and the airline copped a lot of criticism for its actions. We tend to think of it as a one-off. Yet much smaller versions of that event happen every day – flights are cancelled without warning and passengers fail to receive the service they have booked and paid for.

In extreme examples, like the case of Marissa Florias in November, the failure of service has terrible personal consequences. Ms Florias' sister was forced to carry her off the plane and through Perth airport when Jetstar temporarily lost her wheelchair and staff failed to assist.

Somehow, the airline industry has gotten away with this for years, largely escaping the scrutiny of consumer advocates. That, however, is about to change, as part of a new project that will see CHOICE focus on travellers' rights in the air and on the ground.

We've started with a large research project to understand how consumers navigate the travel market and what sorts of problems are most common. Building on this, we'll be doing deeper investigations and providing advice and tips, to help you avoid trouble and protect your rights if something goes wrong.

In a way, our interest in this area was prompted by changes to the regulation of the travel industry. Over the past few years, governments have been dismantling state-based licensing of travel agents, and moving to wind up the Travel Compensation Fund, which used to provide assistance if your travel agent became insolvent.

When governments gave funding to the travel agent industry to help it through the changes, we argued that a comparable amount should be provided to assist consumers in the new environment. This funding was ultimately provided to CHOICE.

We're glad that these changes attracted our attention. The more we start to dig into the travel industry, the more we see examples of problems that would not be tolerated in other sectors.

As the next step in our work, we'll be using the summer period to gather consumers' stories of 'Holiday Horrors'.

I sincerely hope that your summer won't involve one of these, but if you have experienced one in the past, please hop online at **choice.com.au/holidayhorrors** and tell us your story. This might help us to ensure that it doesn't happen to somebody else in the future.

Alan Kirkland, CEO
Email: alan@choice.com.au
Twitter: @AlanKirkland

For general membership and consumer enquiries, phone 1800 069 552

CHOICE

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for the products we test, so remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising or freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, **choice.com.au** and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims. **SUBSCRIBE** To review the full range of membership benefits available to you, go to **choice.com.au/signup** and compare all our options for providing you access to our premium content across our website, mobile, tablet and print products. **SUBSCRIPTIONS/RENEWALS** Call 1800 069 552 or email us at **ausconsumer@choice.com.au**

Axe Australia's second-hand car tax

The government is considering removing restrictions on imports of safe, second-hand cars from overseas. In our submission to the government review considering the proposal, CHOICE supported the move, which could lead to cheaper cars for Australians.

Second-hand cars are often cheaper overseas, but Australian law currently restricts consumers from buying them. The law is meant to protect Australian car manufacturers and ensure the vehicles on our roads meet Australian safety standards.

But given that car manufacturers won't be operating in Australia for much longer and safety concerns can be addressed by restricting imports to cars less than five years old and from countries with standards that meet Australia's, CHOICE believes we shouldn't be prevented from buying second-hand cars from overseas.

SARAH AGAR

ACCC recalls more Infinity electrical cabling

The ACCC has announced additional recalls of Infinity electrical cables following initial recalls in August 2014.

The cable doesn't comply with the electrical safety standard AS/NZS 5000 and experts have advised that the coating may degrade prematurely and break if disturbed, exposing the internal live conductors and potentially causing electric shock or fire. Sales of the cable have been prohibited since October 2013.

Infinity cable was supplied in all states and territories except the Northern Territory. Around 4000km of cable has been sold, affecting an estimated 40,000 households and businesses. Retailers of the cable include Masters Home Improvement, Home Timber & Hardware, Mitre 10 and Thrifty Link.

The cable is branded with INFINITY or OLSENT.

Electricians and builders have been urged to alert their customers and cable suppliers if they've used Infinity cable. However, property owners who've had electrical wiring work carried out during the relevant periods – 2010–13 for NSW, 2011–13 for ACT, 2012–13 for Victoria, WA, SA and Queensland, and 2013 for Tasmania – should also contact their builder, electrical contractor or appliance installer to confirm whether Infinity cable was used.

If Infinity cable was used – or may have been used – the contracted or nominated cable supplier should be given the first opportunity to arrange an inspection of your wiring. The supplier must also arrange for remediation of any installed Infinity cable that they supplied, free of charge to the consumer. Any affected cable installed in accessible areas or near heat sources must be removed and replaced under the safety recall.

If you don't know who the original electrician or appliance installer was, you can arrange for a licensed electrical contractor to inspect your wiring. Unfortunately, inspection costs are not covered if Infinity cable was not installed or if the cable installer and the supplier cannot be determined. Any unused or removed Infinity cable can be returned to the cable supplier for a full refund or replacement.

ACCC deputy chair Delia Rickard cautions, "Consumers should not attempt to inspect cables themselves. The Taskforce found there is no immediate danger but careful steps should be taken by a licensed electrical contractor to avoid electric shock or fires from occurring in coming years. Homeowners and tradespeople are urged to turn off all the main power switches at the switchboard before heading up into the ceiling space at all times".

KARINA BRAY

ASIC to run register of financial advisers

A register of all financial advisers working in Australia will be established in March. Run by the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC), the register will assist ASIC in monitoring advisers and allow consumers to search and verify the details of advisers.

Given the impact that bad financial advice can have on your savings or retirement, this is a welcome move. The register should help ASIC to track and ban bad advisers.

Currently, there is no central record of who works as a financial adviser (though some companies have tried to start their own – see page 13), what their qualifications are or where they have worked in the past. CHOICE participated in the government-initiated working group that led to the register being established.

But it's not all good news. The register won't prevent financial advice scandals like the Commonwealth Financial Planning incident where sales incentives for financial advisers encouraged poor advice and led to consumers losing millions.

CHOICE has consistently called for strong laws that require advisers to always act in the best interests of their clients and to remove all conflicted remuneration from the industry.

ERIN TURNER

NAB to settle credit card penalty fee class action

National Australia Bank (NAB) has decided to throw in the towel on a class action suit targeting excessive bank penalty fees, announcing it will move to settle the case.

NAB's decision comes in the wake of the Federal Court's ruling in February this year against ANZ for charging excessive late payment fees.

The class action by law firm Maurice Blackburn on behalf of 43,500 ANZ customers was one of the largest consumer class actions in history, and follows a High Court decision in 2012 which paved the way for the trial in the Federal Court.

The decision could see NAB paying out up to $40 million in compensation to up to 30,000 customers.

"It's not often we see a bank take a leadership position and genuinely act in the interests of customers so it's important to acknowledge this is a positive step by NAB. We believe this sends a clear message to other businesses who slap on excessive late payment fees that the practice needs to stop," said CHOICE spokesperson Tom Godfrey.

In 2010, CHOICE reported on the first steps of the legal action against unfair penalty fees, and calculated they were adding an extra $1bn a year to the coffers of Australia's banks.

At the time, NAB charged $5 for a late credit card payment, while CBA charged $25 and ANZ $20. In announcing the potential settlement, NAB defended its stance on fees. It said, "NAB was the first and remains the only bank to abolish over-limit fees on credit cards. Since 2010, NAB's credit card late payment fee has been $5 – up to $15 less than our major competitors".

NAB also pointed out that it's the only major bank to abolish dishonour and periodical non-payment fees.

CHOICE kicked off a long-running campaign against bank penalty fees back in 2007 and has laid out specific steps consumers can take to reclaim their fees. We'll continue to push banks to follow NAB's example.

If the Federal Court approves a joint application by the bank and Maurice Blackburn, NAB customers who joined the class action may receive payouts by mid next year.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

In excess: complaints about NBN soar

There were almost 139,000 new complaints to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) during 2013–14, and more than half of those were from mobile users.

The good news is this was the lowest number of new complaints in a year at any time in the past six years, and an overall drop of 12% from the previous year. Complaints about mobile faults such as coverage, slow data speeds and call dropouts almost halved. Customer service and complaint handling concerns also reduced significantly.

But despite the overall drop, there was a big jump in complaints about the NBN, including issues such as delayed connections, unusable services and missed appointments, while complaints about excess data usage charges also jumped.

When it comes to telcos, it seems Optus and Vodafone upped their game while Telstra dropped the ball.

However, Telstra has already introduced some measures that should improve its standing. CHOICE welcomed the company's announcement in November that it would become the first telco in the country to alert customers of their mobile data usage in real time – the industry norm is a delay of up to 48 hours. CHOICE is now calling on other telcos to follow suit to ensure consumers are no longer stung with bill shock or left in the lurch when their data expires sooner than expected.

Telstra will send customers alerts within seconds once they reach 50%, 85% and 100% of their included monthly data allowance in their post-paid plans.

A Telstra spokesperson said they had invested tens of millions of dollars in technology capable of handling hundreds of thousands of data sessions every minute in order to provide the new service.

ROS PAGE and ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Meanwhile, ACCC takes on Telstra

Before Telstra announced measures to improve customer service (see above), it had to promise the ACCC that it would improve its compliance with the Australian Consumer Law (ACL) after it potentially misled customers about their rights when it comes to faulty mobile phones.

Despite the telco having an active ACL compliance program, the ACCC identified more than 400 complaints from customers over a two-year period from January 2011 to November 2013. These complaints raised concerns over possible misrepresentations about consumers' rights under the consumer guarantee provisions of the ACL.

The representations made by Telstra employees may have convinced some consumers that they weren't entitled to a refund, replacement or repair for faulty mobiles, when they may have been.

The complaints identified misrepresentations by Telstra staff that customers weren't entitled to any further remedy if the manufacturer's warranty period was expired; weren't entitled to a refund or replacement of a phone outside of Telstra's timeframe; and couldn't get a replacement unless their phone had already been repaired three times.

"This investigation highlights the importance of businesses educating their staff, and consumers, that consumer guarantee rights are in addition to the business's own policies and any voluntary warranties," ACCC deputy chair Dr Michael Schaper said.

"Customers rely upon the statements that salespeople make in-store, which is why these statements cannot mislead consumers without breaching consumer law. All businesses should ensure that their staff training programs explain a business's obligations under the consumer law."

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Europcar under fire from ACCC

Car rental company Europcar is being taken to court by the ACCC on allegations that their contracts are unfair and contravene the Australian Consumer Law (ACL). The company was also accused of misleading conduct.

The ACCC will argue that Europcar's standard vehicle rental contract contains terms that should be declared void. The offending terms include those that force consumers to fork out a "damage liability fee" of up to $3650 to Europcar if their hire car is damaged or stolen or if there is third-party loss, regardless of who is responsible. Europcar's contract also says that customers are fully liable for anything that might go wrong with the car if they break any term of the contract, regardless of how trivial the breach is and whether it contributes to the damage.

The ACCC also alleged that Europcar engaged in misleading or deceptive conduct and made false or misleading representations on its website. Europcar listed the maximum amount a customer would be liable for if there was loss of or damage to the rental car or a third party. But in actual fact, in some circumstances the customer would be liable for an unlimited amount.

"Vehicle rental contracts are complex in nature and are often entered into during time-sensitive situations, such as airport departures. Consumers have little time to properly assess their rights and obligations under these rental agreements, and no opportunity to negotiate," said ACCC chair Rod Sims.

Europcar has responded to the ACCC's announcement by rejecting all the allegations made against it. The car hire company said that charging the damage liability fee regardless of fault is not unfair, and that it will fight any attempts by the ACCC to stop them. A spokesperson for Europcar said all fees and charges are disclosed on the company's website.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK & THINKSTOCK

Petplan rolls over on offending 'claws'

Under pressure from a CHOICE campaign, Australia's second largest pet insurance company has ceased its practice of continuing to charge premiums after a pet has died.

Petplan said, "In future, we will not require payment of ongoing monthly premium instalments in the policy year following the death of a pet where a claim has been paid for veterinary costs and/or other medical expenses".

This announcement came after a public campaign from CHOICE calling on Petplan to play fair on pet insurance. Nearly 2000 people contacted Petplan and asked them to change their policy.

The campaign was launched after cases raised with CHOICE Help revealed that Petplan continued to charge customers after a pet had died.

In one case, CHOICE member Monika Hooker was told she'd have to keep paying $78 a month for pet insurance until the end of the year even though her British bulldog, Cookie, passed away in August. Selvi and Ross Macleod had a similar experience. They sadly lost their two border collie dogs within months of each other but Petplan informed them that they would need to keep paying insurance premiums until March 2015.

CHOICE Help consumer rights adviser Meredith Cridland said that in both of these cases it was unfair to make owners pay for insurance their pet could never use. "After hearing two almost identical stories of CHOICE members whose pets had died but Petplan was still charging premiums, I thought this was a heartless policy. I'm glad Petplan has decided to listen to CHOICE and pet owners."

Earlier in the year, CHOICE caught Petsure issuing the same sneaky charges but quickly persuaded them to change their practice.

ERIN TURNER

Microsoft pushes cloud storage sky high

Microsoft has trumped its cloud competitors with an unlimited storage offer that includes full access to its Office suite. Previously sold separately, the subscription-based Office 365 – which includes Word, PowerPoint and Excel – will become available bundled with OneDrive storage over the coming months.

Rollout for home, personal and university subscribers has already begun, and existing 365 users can apply at the OneDrive website to be first in line for the upgrade, but this won't guarantee immediate access.

This comes as the latest in a series of cloud-focused moves by the tech giant, which earlier this year increased its free storage plan to 15GB and the basic limit for Office 365 subscribers to 1TB. In September, Microsoft also increased the individual file size limit from 2GB to 10GB.

The escalating cloud storage war now has Office 365 with OneDrive starting at $9 a month or $89 for a full year, leaving behind competitors such as Dropbox and Google Drive. Dropbox has 1TB of storage available for $10.99 a month or $109 a year but without an added office suite, while Google Drive offers 1TB for $9.99 a month with access to their web-based office software.

Office 365 with OneDrive personal subscriptions are linked to a single account which can be accessed from any compatible device, and up to five account holders can use a home subscription. Standard OneDrive plans with 100GB and 200GB storage without Office 365 are still available for $2 and $4 per month respectively.

PETER ZALUZNY

New site to make buying ethical clothing easier

A new site designed to make shopping for ethical clothing easier has been launched by the not-for-profit group Ethical Consumers Australia. The site, Good On You, provides an ethical rating for around 13,000 products and 100 brands on its website.

The products are linked to the purchase sites of retail partners such as The Iconic, Rebel, Yoox.com, David Jones and G-Star. Earlier this year CHOICE looked into the issue of ethical clothing and found out how difficult it is to trace the supply chains of the clothes you buy.

The ethical ratings provided by Good On You take into account labour rights, animal welfare and environmental concerns, and are tailored for each product category based on what the important issues are.

Brands are rated on a sliding scale from Better Choice (a product with an independent certification such as Fairtrade) to Not Recommended. Where a brand hasn't been certified or rated by one of these sources, Good On You has developed its own research and rating system.

As well as the shopping portal, Good On You provides consumers with information on ethical fabric choices, and advice on making more ethical purchasing choices.

Good On You plans to launch other product categories, such as homewares, beauty and personal care products, electronics and sporting goods, in the future.

JEMMA CASTLE

Big ticket win for consumers

Ticketek and Ticketmaster have improved their pricing practices regarding additional fees. The move follows an investigation into drip pricing by the ACCC, as well as years of campaigning from CHOICE.

The ACCC investigated both Ticketek and Ticketmaster's 1.95% payment processing fees as well as Ticketek's $8.95 service/delivery fee and Ticketmaster's $8.35 handling fee.

While payment processing fees can be avoided if paying in-person with cash or if using the company's gift vouchers, they're hard to avoid for online purchases. However, Ticketek's service/delivery fee and Ticketmaster's handling fee can't be avoided.

CHOICE first looked into the ticketing practices of Ticketek and Ticketmaster back in 2009 and then again in 2012, and found a lack of disclosure around unavoidable prices. We also found there was little opportunity to choose a different vendor, as ticket agencies often have exclusive ticketing rights to venues.

"Although the law does not prevent traders from charging fees, it does require that they are disclosed clearly to avoid consumers being misled," said ACCC deputy chair Delia Rickard.

Under Australian Consumer Law, a single minimum total price needs to be included as prominently as any advertised part price. This means that any unavoidable fees must be disclosed at the outset.

While the two ticketing companies are allowed to charge the fees, they're now required to disclose unavoidable fees earlier in the online booking process. This means they incorporate their minimum payment processing fees into the per-ticket prices they display on their websites. In addition, the handling fee charged by Ticketmaster and the service/delivery fee charged by Ticketek is now included in the total price once it's calculable. For Ticketmaster this is when the total number of tickets is selected, and for Ticketek it's once the number of tickets is selected and the delivery method chosen.

Drip pricing, where extra fees and charges are sprung on the consumer throughout the booking process, is also common with airlines' ticket sales. Earlier this year the ACCC took action against Jetstar and Virgin Australia, alleging the airlines engaged in misleading or deceptive conduct and made false or misleading representations in relation to particular fares.

The problem isn't unique to Australia either – in New Zealand, consumers are facing similar problems with misleading prices from Ticketek, Ticketmaster and some airlines.

JEMMA CASTLE

Gift cards: the gift that doesn't keep on giving

Gift cards expiring before they could be redeemed was consumers' number one complaint about them to NSW Fair Trading this year, with the department warning to redeem gift cards as soon as possible after receiving them.

In one case, a retailer rejected a gift voucher that had expired just the day before. Fair Trading intervened and the retailer relented. NSW Minister for Fair Trading Matthew Mason-Cox said while some traders may extend the expiry date as a goodwill gesture, they are not legally obligated to.

Australians spend up to $2.5bn per year buying gift cards for their families and friends, and much of this money is wasted. See our report on p19 for more.

UTA MIHM

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK & THINKSTOCK

Car companies show contempt for consumers

There are concerns that time may be up for the independent car mechanic, with news that the automotive industry has blocked moves to allow them access to data and tools to repair modern cars.

Earlier this year, the federal government sanctioned negotiations to establish a voluntary code of conduct between independent repairers and car companies that would allow access to vehicle service and repair data. But now the group that represents car makers and importers, the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (FCAI), has pulled out of the negotiations and announced that it will develop its own voluntary code of conduct for car servicing.

The peak national body representing motoring consumers, the Australian Automobile Association (AAA), is concerned the move will leave Australians with less choice in vehicle repairers, as business is driven back to the car dealerships.

Modern cars are becoming more and more like 'computers on wheels', and it's become increasingly difficult for independent mechanics to access specific information, computer upgrades and the sophisticated diagnostics equipment now needed to service many vehicles without this being provided by the manufacturer.

Modern car keys, which can cost up to $1000 to replace if lost or broken are similarly 'locked down', with some requiring unique PIN codes for the key to be recognised by the car's computer during replacement.

In many cases these codes are not provided to car owners, and are held either by the dealers, or in some cases the manufacturers overseas, effectively locking independent mechanics, auto electricians and auto locksmiths out of the market. Auto locksmiths can't provide a replacement service for some car brands or have to invest in expensive diagnostic equipment to work without the code. As a result the cost is passed on to customers.

In the US, independent car technicians can apply to access a register of PIN codes which allow repairs, access to the car's computer and the ability to re-set car keys. This in turn allows car owners to shop around and to choose who does the servicing.

AAA chief executive Andrew McKellar said FCAI's decision to proceed with the release of its code while efforts were still underway to resolve a broader agreement with consumers and other stakeholders represents a serious breach of faith.

In the USA and in Europe, car manufacturers and dealers must make information available to independent workshops, which usually pay a subscription fee for up-to-date information on car models.

The Australian Automotive Aftermarket Association (AAAA) argues that a similar arrangement should be available in Australia for competition and to give consumers greater choice. Executive director Stuart Charity said, "As these are the same multinational car companies operating in the Australian market, we must ask the FCAI: 'Why do you believe Australian consumers do not deserve the same rights as car owners in Europe and North America?'"

The AAA wants the federal government to step in on behalf of Australian motorists. "Consumers deserve the right to have genuine choice about where to have their vehicle serviced or repaired and we have urged the Minister for Small Business to intervene to protect the rights of the motoring public," said McKellar.

KATE BROWNE

WA car insurance increases

Compulsory third party (CTP) premiums will increase by $109 if the WA government follows other states into a 'no fault' scheme, which will provide compensation for people with catastrophic injuries regardless of who is at fault in a motor accident.

Under the current system, if you're injured in a car crash you have to prove the other driver is at fault to claim against their CTP insurance. But if you're unable to prove the other driver was at fault, or if it's a single car accident like a kangaroo bouncing off the bumper, then you'll have to fend for yourself with government assistance, personal insurance or help from family and friends.

The proposed changes will mean about an extra 45 people a year with injuries such as spinal cord, traumatic brain, multiple amputations, severe burns and permanent blindness will receive compensation, hence the increase in premiums.

South Australia recently introduced a no-fault system for catastrophic injuries while NSW (where it's called a 'green slip') recently withdrew proposed reforms to move from a no-fault system for catastrophic injuries to a wider no-fault system.

JODI BIRD

Coles apples no spring chickens

Coles is in hot water again, this time facing fire from the Advertising Standards Board (ASB) over a misleading advertisement in which its apples were promoted as fresh – when they were, in fact, over three months old.

In the ad, which aired in Tasmania over four days in August and September, Curtis Stone made reference to Tasmanian Pink Lady apples being fresh at Coles right now, and then suggested that you "feed your family better, fresher, with spring fruit and veg from Coles..."

A complaint, upheld by the ASB, said: "This is wrong and not possible, I live in Tassie and my apple tree is dormant! These apples would have been in storage for MONTHS, they are not fresh".

The ad was found to be misleading and in breach of advertising body AANA's Food and Beverages Advertising and Marketing Communications Code because the average consumer would think that the apples were picked in recent weeks and not three months ago.

Coles, in its response, said it believes "apples can remain fresh, even if placed in cold storage. 'Freshness' is determined with regard to the quality of the produce, not whether it has been stored or not".

Quality, said Coles, is based on a number of criteria including taste, texture, smell, size, colour, absence of deterioration and lack of blemishes.

Interestingly, the ASB was satisfied that a reasonable consumer would understand that cold storage, even if for an extended period of time, can still result in a 'fresh' product. However, it was the addition of the term "spring fruit" in the ad that tipped it over the edge. In its determination, the board said Coles changed the context of the term 'fresh' to "imply that the advertised apples are spring fruit and have been freshly picked during the spring season ready for immediate sale".

It's not the first time that Coles' definition of 'freshness' has been brought into question. The supermarket was last in the media spotlight in September for its "freshly baked" bread claims.

JEMMA CASTLE

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK & THINKSTOCK

Squeeze being eased

Nearly nine out of ten Australian householders said their bills have gone up over the past 12 months, but CHOICE's latest national *Consumer Pulse Report* nonetheless indicates a general easing of cost-of-living concerns.

Householders who said it's tough to make ends meet on their current income fell from 31% to 27% since our previous report. Those who said they're living comfortably rose from 23% to 29%.

There are also significantly fewer Australians cutting back on essentials than in the months immediately following the release of the Federal Budget – down from 46% doing without to 34%. Cutbacks on non-essentials also fell, from 62% to 52%.

But there's still plenty of room for worry among the 87% who reported an increase in bills and expenses over the past 12 months, and electricity has remained the top household concern for eight in 10 Australians since June.

It hasn't helped that projected price reductions following the repeal of the carbon tax have not come to pass for most consumers. Two months after the repeal, 59% of consumers said they haven't seen a reduction in household expenses.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Cutting the fat

The Tefal OptiGrill is designed to grill meat, fish, vegetables, fruits and sandwiches. Like other health grills before it, fat drains away into a drip tray, resulting in a less calorie-laden meal. Those afraid of over- or under-cooking their food will find the six pre-programmed modes handy, as well as the automatic sensor that beeps at each stage of cooking. There's even a cooking level indicator that changes to a particular colour depending on whether the food is rare, medium or well done.

Fiona Mair, home economist from CHOICE's test kitchen, cooked a variety of foods on the OptiGrill and rated its cooking performance as very good, with an average of 12 minutes cooking time (including preheat). For consistent cooking, the instructions recommend food be even in height and not exceed four centimetres in thickness. Our rump steaks were very good; meat was tender and juicy with only slightly uneven browning. The salmon was slightly dry in areas, but good overall. The grill particularly excelled at cooking bacon to well done.

But the grill generated a fair bit of smoke during preheating and cooking, and occasionally food slid on the hotplate, defying the spikes on the bottom plate that are meant to hold it in place. Be warned that the outside can become dangerously hot and it doesn't have non-slip feet.

At 37cm wide by 37cm deep (including the drip tray), the OptiGrill takes up valuable benchtop space and there's no way to store it vertically or lock the hinge. The exterior, including the handle, can become very greasy and the char-grill grooves on the hotplate, although removable, can be fiddly to clean. The fact you need to cook food that's at a uniform height can also be limiting. Also, the 20x30cm hotplate is mostly only suitable when cooking for two people at a time.

TEFAL OPTIGRILL
PRICE $230
CONTACT tefal.com.au

CHOICE verdict

The OptiGrill is a great alternative to a basic sandwich press as it can do a lot more, and we liked its automatic sensor. But you'll need to weigh that up against how much it costs, the smoke and grease it generates, how tricky it is to clean and the space it takes up in your kitchen. **KIM GILMOUR**

ASIC to launch financial adviser review site

ASIC has announced that it will launch a financial adviser review website as a resource to help consumers "verify the credentials of financial advisers and be confident that they are appropriately qualified and experienced", according to the office of the Minister for Finance. It's expected to be live by March next year.

But – as with a number of websites already up and running – it probably won't do enough to help consumers determine whether an adviser has a financial incentive to recommend one product over another.

Furthermore, a government spokesperson told us it will be up to the financial services licence holders and the advisers who work for them to make sure the information on the ASIC site is accurate and up to date (although it should be said that providing false information to a government agency is illegal).

BT Financial has launched its own review service, Adviser View, and claims it will independently verify adviser credentials. It's a crucial step, since adviser qualifications can be spotty to non-existent.

The BT Financial site will cover 1100 advisers in the Westpac network, which includes BT Financial, Westpac, St George Bank, Bank of Melbourne and BankSA. It will allow users to apply star ratings to advisers based on their experience.

Another new entry to the adviser review field, Adviser Ratings, also invites consumers to rate and leave comments about advisers. The site is built on a register of about 18,000 financial advisers and – in a nod to detecting conflicts of interest – includes details about who owns their practices. Advisers are invited to add information about their qualifications, memberships of industry bodies, compliance policies and experience.

Adviser Ratings already seems to have outed advisers who've left a trail of disgruntled customers. One adviser based in Brookvale on Sydney's northern beaches received low marks across the board – 15% overall customer rating, 19% for quality of advice, and 8% for customer satisfaction out of a possible 100%.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

5 stars for health stars

More companies are jumping on the Health Star Rating Scheme bandwagon, with SPC Ardmona and Mayvers joining Monster Muesli in displaying the new ratings on their products. Uncle Tobys is getting into the spirit of things on its website, but CHOICE has yet to spot its star ratings in-store.

The Health Star Rating Scheme is a voluntary front-of-pack nutrition labelling scheme developed over the past two years by consumer, health and industry groups in a government-led process. It combines a star rating of between ½ a star and five stars with details about key nutrients like saturated fat, sugar and sodium, as well as energy, to give consumers at-a-glance information.

According to CHOICE policy and campaigns adviser Katinka Day, this front-of-pack labelling system will ultimately help consumers make healthier food choices.

"We are starting to see products with health star ratings hit the shelves, which is really great news. Now the challenge is to encourage more food companies to get on board. The more products with health stars, the more consumers will be able to compare products and benefit from this scheme."

RACHEL CLEMONS

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK & THINKSTOCK

Your Say

We want to hear from you. If you've had a bad experience, been ripped off or scammed, tell us and help other CHOICE members avoid the same traps. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and we regret that we cannot reply to all correspondence.

Contact us!

Email us at **yoursay@choice.com.au** or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Credit barred

I received a $100 store credit voucher with a large purchase from Homeart a year ago, and when I asked how long I had to use it, I was told "it doesn't expire". I then spent some of it over the past year. Trying to spend the final $17 last week, a staff member advised me that it had expired – that it was "only valid for 12 months". I said I was told the voucher would not expire. I was made to feel like I was making things up, as the girl who advised me is no longer working for the store. Furthermore, there is no expiry date printed on the receipt itself. I raised it with Homeart's head office and they were not able or willing to help.

Yvonne, Camden, NSW

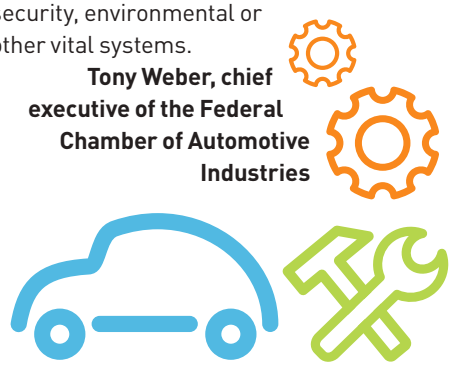
CHOICE SAYS *Gift cards and vouchers that expire too soon are a common source of complaints to Fair Trading – you can read more in our story on page 19 of this issue. In this case, Homeart are unfortunately correct in that you can't prove you were told the voucher wouldn't expire. But as you've been given conflicting information, no expiry date was written on the voucher, and you tried to use it up so soon after the cut-off, we suggest you contact Fair Trading in your state to try to resolve the issue.*

The genuine article

I write in response to CHOICE's article about car part prices in the October magazine. When having your vehicle serviced or repaired, you should be aware that many components of a vehicle interact with others as part of the vehicle's operating systems – including safety, environmental and security systems. As such, the use of genuine or demonstrably equivalent parts is vital to maintain the integrity of your vehicle.

Manufacturers' service and repair procedures are based on the use of genuine parts and an investment in training and equipment to ensure a vehicle is restored to its original integrity. Non-genuine parts may look the same, but if they differ in the slightest, they can be a serious safety risk. For example, a non-genuine airbag fitted to a vehicle may not deploy at the right time or engage effectively with a vehicle's safety systems; an airbag deploying even 7/100ths of a second late could seriously jeopardise the safety of a driver or passenger. This is why car manufacturers promote the use of genuine parts, which are known to perform as designed. If service or repair providers insist a non-genuine part is 'the same' it is important to seek evidence that it meets Australian design rules or original equipment specifications––, and that it will not impact your vehicle's safety, security, environmental or other vital systems.

Tony Weber, chief executive of the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries



IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Thumbs

We were given a set of solar garden lights for Christmas last year, purchased from Bunnings, distributed by Merlin Distribution. Despite being properly charged, the lights never worked and after a bit of email prompting Merlin sent us a new solar panel – it too was faulty – and then a whole new set, which the manager tested before sending. We are very impressed with this service and are very satisfied customers.

Joy and Ian Porter, Portarlington, Vic

I have had a Weber Baby Q for quite a while. It normally lives in the caravan and has toured most of central and west Australia; during the "quiet" season it lives on the back deck. The other day, it would not light from the electronic ignition. I replaced the battery but no luck. I contacted Weber and they sent me a new ignition module by express post, free of charge. BBQ now works great again. Now that is what I call excellent customer service. Top marks Weber.

Wal Pywell, Wanniassa, ACT

"A number of online posts show that other users had identical failings of that model"

Burning rage

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I purchased a Black & Decker cordless pole (pruning) saw in April 2008; recently, the battery charger overheated to the point of burning damage to the internal electronics. Although the nominal 48-month warranty had expired, I felt I still had a legitimate claim for warranty replacement under Australian Consumer Law, especially as the problem related only to the charger unit. This is a simple piece of electronics, which has no moving parts and is not subject to any effective wear and tear under normal use. Indeed, at most the charger might have charged a (B&D branded) battery no more than 30 or so times during the six years since purchase.

A number of online posts show that other users had identical failings of that model of charger, and Black & Decker have recently replaced the charger model (now 90515050-01, previously 5100235-09) to take the same battery design. This suggests the original design was faulty and subject to unexpected severe overheating.

I contacted B&D via e-mail; they replied quickly and politely, but maintained they could not replace the charger unit as it was out of warranty and I would need to purchase the replacement model. When I challenged this, saying the original charger unit design/construction was very clearly not fit for purpose and, moreover, a fire hazard, B&D maintained that they were not violating Australian Consumer Law by refusing to replace the unit, steadfastly maintaining it was 'fit for purpose' and simply out of their specified warranty period. Sorry B&D, but six years of occasional use for a piece of electronics that should easily last 10 years does not, in my opinion, get you off the hook.

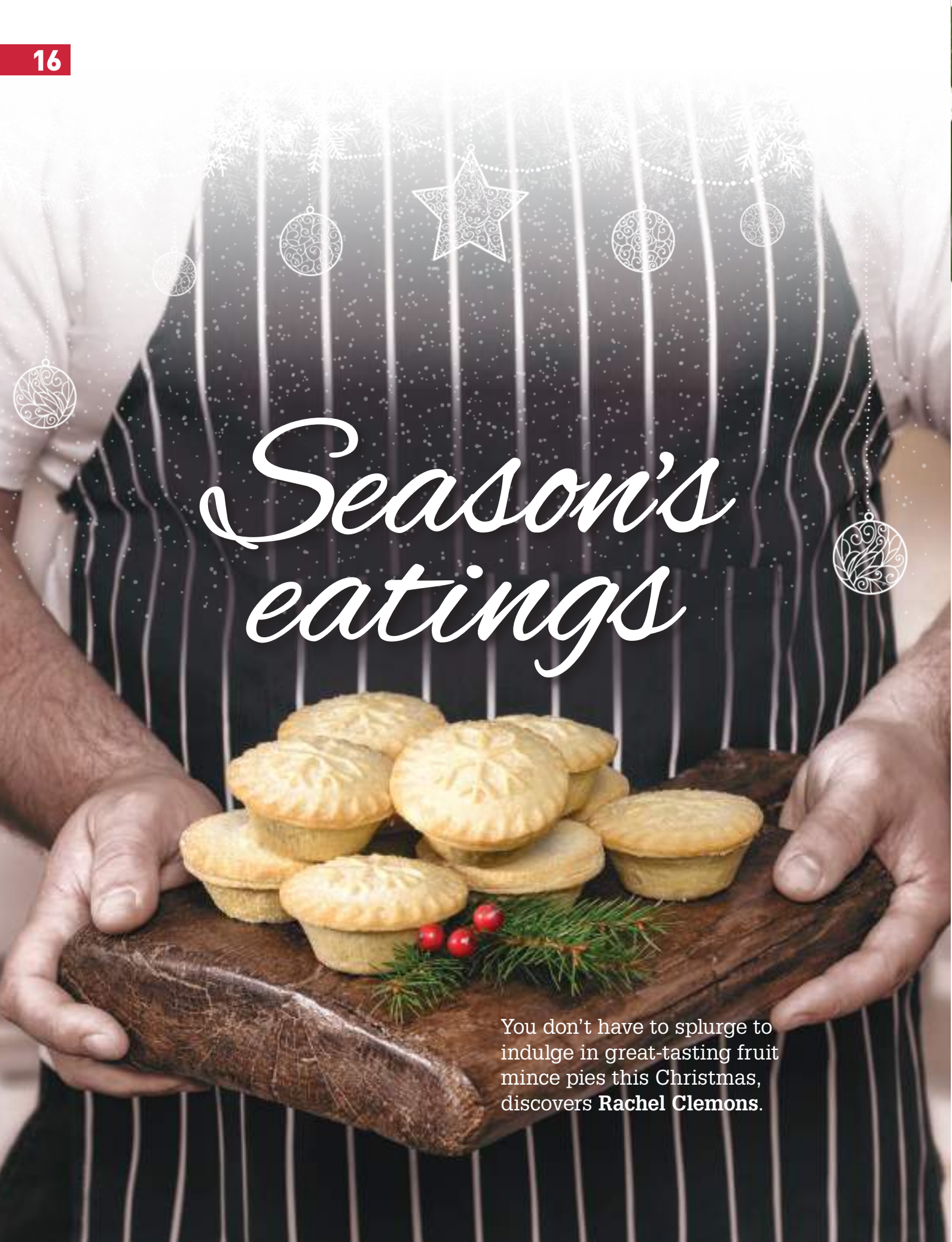
Craig Klauber, Leeming, WA

CHOICE SAYS *It's reasonable to expect an infrequently used battery charger to last longer than a few years, and certainly for a lot more than 30 recharges. Unfortunately, you may be pushing your luck to claim it's not fit for purpose under consumer law, especially as the ACL only applies to purchases made after 1 January 2011 and previous laws were not as easy to enforce. Nevertheless, the overheating part is a real concern. We think it's worth your while to raise this with your state's Fair Trading body.*

I am writing this after reading the thumbs down letter in the last CHOICE magazine. We bought a Sharp convection microwave about four years ago along with a David Jones extended warranty. This microwave was returned three times for the same fault. It would microwave OK, but it would not cook as a convection oven. We were told that the bearings in the fan mechanism are subject to burnout and that it was a common problem. However, the insurance company

has a policy that if an appliance fails three times then it is replaced. This replacement had to be the same model. So we have another Sharp convection microwave and guess what? Same fault. Useless for convection cooking, but works as a microwave. Sharp is off my list.

Warren Hurst, Manly, Qld



Season's eatings

You don't have to splurge to indulge in great-tasting fruit mince pies this Christmas, discovers **Rachel Clemons**.

The festive season is upon us, which means it's time to let out our belts and indulge in some Christmas goodies. While ham, turkey, fresh seafood and fruit cake are available year round, treats like Christmas fruit mince pies and tarts only make an appearance at this time of year. We set about finding which ones deserve a place on your table.

Our expert panel of judges munched their way through 12 mince pies and tarts in a blind taste test. They rated them on appearance, taste, aroma and texture. They were looking for a good ratio of evenly cooked pastry and mince filling, with evident texture of fruit and a balanced flavour of fruit, spices and other ingredients.

We found you don't need to splurge to tantalise your taste buds.

Not-so-humble pies

The highest scoring product – Coles Finest Fruit Mince Pies ($7 for a pack of six) – is at least twice the price of the others on "The best" list, but isn't the most expensive tested by a long shot. At this time of year, it's good to know you can save money without compromising on taste.

Coles Finest pies were complimented on their "good short pastry", which "dissolves to a nice texture in the mouth". The judges also liked the filling with its "moist, soft and plentiful" dried fruit pieces, a "good balance of flavours" and a "good proportion of fruit to pastry".

Woolworths Select Fruit Mince Pies ($2.20 for six), Coles Fruit Mince Pies ($2 for six) and Aldi's The Cake Stall Luxury Fruit Mince Pies ($3.49 for six) were our runners-up, with the added sweetener of costing half as much as the top-scoring Coles Finest pies.

You can save money without compromising on taste

The Woolworths Select pies were praised for their "well-made" appearance and "evenly baked" pastry, but the judges thought they had a little too much sugar on top. The panel liked the lattice top on the Coles pies, their "good ratio of filling to pastry" and "well-balanced flavours" that were "not over-spiced", but didn't approve of their oily bases. Aldi's The Cake Stall Luxury pies were commended on their "appealing" and "festive" appearance, and their "lovely short, buttery tasting pastry", despite it being crumbly.

THE BEST
The following pies tantalised the taste buds of our judges, and received the highest average scores:
Score 7.7 $7 for six
Coles Finest Fruit Mince Pies
Tasting notes: "A well-produced and finished pie with a crisp outer shell that dissolves to a nice texture in the mouth."
Score 6.3 $2.20 for six
Woolworths Select Fruit Mince Pies
Tasting notes: "A pie of nice size and shape, with good colour and properly baked through."
Score 6.2 $2 for six
Coles Fruit Mince Pies
Tasting notes: "A pie that looks and tastes good with well-balanced mild fruity aromas and not overly spiced."
Score 6.2 $3.49 for six
The Cake Stall (Aldi) Luxury Fruit Mince Pies
Tasting notes: "A neatly produced, traditional festive pie, with short buttery tasting pastry with interesting flavour and texture."

Pricey pies disappoint

Boutique brands don't always deliver on taste. Puddings on the Ritz Fruit Mince Tarts, which we picked up at David Jones ($14.95 for a pack of four), and mince tarts from boutique foodie mecca Jones the Grocer ($14.50 for six), didn't impress our judges, let down predominantly by hard pastry and overcooked filling respectively. Along with Woolworths Homebrand ($1.70 for six), they scored lowest.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK PRICES BASED ON THE PRICE PAID IN OCTOBER 2014

THE REST

Specially Selected Aldi Shortcrust Pastry Mince Pies **Score: 5.9** Price: $4.99 for six
Mr Kipling Fruit Mince Pies **Score: 5.8** Price: $4.00 for six
The Cake Stall Aldi Fruit Mince Pies **Score: 5.7** Price: $1.69 for six
Tart Box Christmas Mince Tarts **Score: 5.3** Price: $8.75 for five
Woolworths Gold Fruit Mince Pies **Score: 4.7** Price: $6.50 for six
Puddings on the Ritz Fruit Mince Tarts **Score: 4.4** Price: $14.95 for four
Woolworths Homebrand Fruit Mince Pies **Score: 4.0** Price: $1.70 for six
Jones the Grocer Mince Tarts **Score: 4.0** Price: $14.50 for six

How we test

We tested 12 pies that were available to buy in October, including those sold by major supermarkets as well as smaller boutique brands readily available online or via distributors.

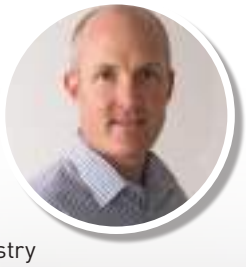
Each expert independently assessed the mince pies scoring them on: taste (40%), appearance (20%), aroma (20%), texture (20%). Final scores are out of a possibile score of 10.

Meet the experts

Alison Mutton represents the CWA. Her experience ranges from judging The Land Cookery Competitions over the past 16 years at both a local and state level, to appearing as a guest judge on *MasterChef*.

Jan Boon is a home economist who has been involved in the food industry for more than 40 years. She is an RAS-recognised judge for the Fine Food Show and Easter Show and has been judging for local, interstate and regional shows for more than 35 years. This year she was recognised by the Penrith Show Society for her continued service in judging.

Brigid Treloar ran her own cake business for 10 years. Her experience as a food judge includes Royal Agricultural Show (RAS) Fine Food Show and Easter Show judging. She's also a cookbook author, educator, media presenter and freelance food consultant.



Andre Sandison is a chef who teaches Patisserie at Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Arts Institute in Sydney. He captained the winning Team Pastry Australia in the 2012 Asian Pastry Cup and is an RAS-recognised judge for the Professional Bakery Competition at the Sydney Royal Fine Food Show.

Judy Betteridge also represents the CWA. She's been involved with cooking for and judging The Land Cookery Competitions over the past 13 years. Judy teaches jam and pickle making and was a major contributor to a cookbook representing her local area. ■

Passing the bucks

Which gift cards do CHOICE members want to see under the Christmas tree? **Uta Mihm** finds out

Aussies spend up to $2.5bn on gift cards for family and friends every year, and nearly 90% of us received a gift card or gave one as a present in the past 12 months. But many gift cards expire too soon and come with strings attached like hidden fees and conditions – leaving many recipients empty-handed. In fact, one in three of the 735 respondents to our survey of CHOICE members had lost the full value of at least one gift card in the past three years.

Gift card expiry date

Sixty per cent of our survey takers had problems with gift cards, and premature expiry was the biggest issue. NSW Fair Trading Minister Matthew Mason-Cox tells CHOICE that early expiration is the number one complaint made about gift cards.

$50 was the most popular gift card amount in our survey

Mason-Cox recalls a consumer complaint where a retailer didn't honour a gift card just one day after it expired.

"If the card has expired, then legally the retailer doesn't have an obligation to honour it." In this case the retailer relented after Fair Trading stepped in. But CHOICE has heard of many cases where complaints to the retailer fell on deaf ears.

35% had a gift card expire before they could use it

It never hurts to ask, though. Of our surveyed members who requested that an expired card be reinstated, about a third were successful. "I explained that I had missed their cut-off time, but the restaurant cheerfully honoured the card," one member, Gillian, told us.

50% believe a gift card should not expire at all

Check to see if the expiry date is printed on the gift card. If not, the trader must allow "reasonable time" in which to use the card under ASIC regulations. But the definition of reasonable may be very different for consumers and retailers.

While expiry dates vary from a few months to two years, half of our survey respondents said a gift card should never expire. Melissa, a member, expressed a view shared by many: "I don't understand why gift cards have such short expiry dates. The store has taken the money; they should be obliged to honour the card for a minimum of 10 years."

Short changed

In late 2011, the Commonwealth Consumer Affairs Advisory Council launched an inquiry into the gift card market and released an issues paper that highlighted the problems. But ultimately this had little impact, and consumer rights in Australia still lag behind other markets. In the US, for example, gift cards can't expire in under five years and clear fee disclosure is mandatory. As a result, it's estimated that just one per cent of gift cards purchased in the US end up expiring or going unused.

Top gift cards to buy for Christmas

About half the respondents to our survey would like Santa to deliver gift cards for Christmas. However, only 26% actually prefer gift cards to cash. When we asked which gift card they wanted, there were some clear winners and losers.

BRAND	STORES IT CAN BE USED AT	NO PURCHASE FEE	EXPIRY (MONTHS)
Bunnings	Bunnings	✓	Unlimited
Coles Group and Myer	Coles group stores including Myer, Target, Kmart, Coles Supermarkets, Coles Express, BI-LO, Liquorland, Vintage Cellars, 1st Choice Liquor Superstore and Officeworks plus Coles Central, and Kmart Tyre & Auto services	✓	24
David Jones	David Jones	✓	24
Dymocks	Dymocks	✓	12
Facebook	Facebook games	✓	Unlimited
Hoyts	Hoyts cinemas movie tickets and candy bar		12
iTunes	Australian iTunes store, App Store, iBooks Store and Mac App Store	✓	(B)
Load&Go Visa (Australia Post)	Any merchant who accepts Visa Prepaid		(C)
Myer	Myer	✓	24
Red Balloon	2000+ experiences offered through Red Balloon	(A)	12
Westfield	8000 Stores in Westfield shopping centres nationally, including Woolworths, Myer, David Jones, Target and Kmart but not Coles or cinemas		12
Westfield XS	Most retailers accepting EFTPOS, excluding Coles or cinemas		12
Wish Gift Card	Woolworths, Big W, Dick Smith, Thomas Dux, Masters, Cellarmasters, BWS, Dan Murphy, participating Caltex Woolworths, participating Home Timber & Hardware stores	✓	12

TABLE NOTES (A) Purchase fee for experience voucher or gift voucher, no fee for gift card **(B)** 24 (from issue or last activity) **(C)** Fixed expiry date – minimum 12 months **(D)** Yes for experience vouchers, no for gift vouchers experience voucher or gift voucher, no for gift card

Gift cards our members don't want

Percentage of respondents who wouldn't like these cards to appear under their Christmas tree:

EB Games	48%	Flight centre	33%
Google Play	46%	Ticketmaster	30%
Online discount vouchers (e.g. Groupon)	42%	Ticketek	30%
Toys R Us	40%	iTunes	28%
Red Balloon	37%	IKEA	26%
Beauty (e.g. facial)	36%	Fashion stores	26%

What makes a good gift card?

- **Expiry date** Choose a card that doesn't expire, like the Bunnings card (which tops our list of popular cards – see opposite page). Otherwise go for one with a long expiry date like the second-most popular card – Coles Group & Myer – which is valid for two years. Or look for a card that is valid for at least 12 months, and preferably allows a grace period or even allows you to exchange an expired card for a new one – Woolworths Wish ticks all the boxes.
- **Balance** Ideally you'd like to be able to check the card balance easily instore, online and via phone. Beware of cards that charge a fee to check the balance.
- **Transactions** Ideally, you should be able to use the card for an unlimited number of transactions until you've spent the whole amount. Minimum spend amounts can be an issue, especially if the retailer doesn't give change, as there may be an amount left on the card that you can't use.
- **Lost or stolen cards** You usually have to treat your gift card like cash – if you lose it, it's gone. However, some retailers allow you to cancel and re-issue a lost card, sometimes for a fee. Conditions apply, so hold on to your receipts for gift cards and jot down details such as the card number.
- **Restrictions** You can usually only use a gift card in a specific store, so choose carefully – surveyed members said the worst cards to receive were ones for stores they don't shop in. Cards that can be used in a group of stores, such as the Coles Group and Myer gift card and Woolworths Wish card, are better. Shopping centre cards can be used in an even wider variety of stores, but they may not be accepted by all stores in the shopping centre; for example, the Westfield card can't be used in Coles or in cinemas. EFTPOS and Visa/MasterCard gift cards can be used at almost any retailer.
- **Fees and charges** Fees are mainly a problem with Visa and MasterCard gift cards. Most retailer cards have no fees, but some cards like Westfield charge an issue fee. Others may charge a fee for extending the expiry period or reinstating lost or stolen cards.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

30-DAY GRACE PERIOD?	REINSTATED IF EXPIRED?	REPLACED IF LOST OR STOLEN?	REPLACED IF DAMAGED?
na	na		
	(E)		✓
na	na		
✓			✓
			✓
			(E)
(D)	(E)	✓	(G)
		✓	✓
		✓	✓
✓	(F)	✓	✓

and gift cards **(E)** Case-by-case basis **(F)** Woolworths told CHOICE this would be possible on request **(G)** Yes for

Our survey – key results:

We conducted a survey of CHOICE members in late September/ early October 2014. Of the 735 respondents:

- A large majority have given and/or received at least one gift card in the last three years.
- The most popular gift card amount was $50. The average amount was $70 for giving a gift card and $90 for receiving a gift card.

Sixty per cent of members receiving a gift card had problems using at least one gift card in the last three years. The most common problems were:

- The card expired before the full value was used.
- It was difficult to find something they wanted to buy in the store(s) where the card could be used.
- It was hard to check the balance on the card or there was a fee to check the balance
- Some stores / outlets did not accept the card, for example, a shopping centre card. ■

There's no single "best" travel money card out there, but some will suit your travel plans better than others. **Andy Kollmorgen** catches up with the market

More and more financial services providers are getting in on the travel money card game these days, and why not? It's a fresh opportunity to hit you up with fees and exchange rate margins. But as long as you get your head around the ins and outs, packing some pre-loaded plastic can be a winning financial decision for globetrotters as well.

Qantas and Virgin got into the travel money game last year, and the Qantas Cash card and Virgin's Velocity Global Wallet card are now among the best in the pre-loadable class. Needless to say, both cards encourage you to rack up frequent flyer points. In fact, you need to be a member of the related frequent flyer program to use either card. But even if chasing points isn't your thing they have some of the best features and lowest fees.

Watch those fees!

As with all things foreign exchange, you'll need to keep an eye on the currency rates on offer. We found they were more or less the same across the market with the exception of the OzForex Travel Card, which offered better rates. But rates change often, and even good ones can be offset by sneaky fees.

Exchange rates change often, and even good ones can be offset by sneaky fees

Unlike many of the other cards on offer, the airline cards have no purchasing or loading fees and offer free reloading. Here are the main travel card fees to watch for:

Fees for the card itself

- Initial card fee
- Supplementary card fee
- Replacement card fee

Fees for using (or not using) the card

- Fee for loading currencies onto the card.
- Fee for reloading currencies on the card. Some providers cap this at $10 or $15, and some take 1% or 1.1% of the amount you load with no limit.
- Transaction fees for currencies not loaded on the card – charged when you buy something in currency you haven't loaded on to your card or don't have enough of.
- Inactivity fee – charged monthly when you don't use your card for a certain length of time (generally one year).
- ATM and other transaction fees charged by local merchants or financial institutions.

TRAVEL MONEY CARDS	VELOCITY GLOBAL	QANTAS CASH
GENERAL FEES		
Initial loading	Free	Free
Reloading	Free	Free
Replacement card	Free	Free
Supplementary card	$10	Unavailable
Monthly inactivity fee	$1 after 12 months	None
ATM FEES (PER WITHDRAWAL)		
New Zealand	$NZ2.50	$NZ2.50
Europe (euros)	€1.50	€1.50
UK (pounds)	£1.25	£1.25
USA	$US1.95	$US1.95
Thailand (baht)	฿60	฿70
OTHER DETAILS		
Frequent flyer points	1 point for every $A2 spent; 1 point per equivalent of $A1 spent in foreign currency	1 point for every $A2 spent; 1 point per equivalent of $A1 spent in foreign currency
Number of currencies available	10	11
Max currencies per card	5	11

IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

Fee breakdown

We compare the main features of the Velocity Global Wallet and Qantas Cash cards and list ATM fees for currencies in five top travel destinations for Australians: New Zealand, Europe, the UK, the US and Thailand. The airlines go tit-for-tat on ATM fees with these and most other currencies, so ATM costs shouldn't be a deal-breaker when choosing one over the other.

Do I need a travel money card?

That depends on the length of your trip and your budget for spending money. If you're travelling for a couple of weeks or more and shopping is on the agenda, a travel money card is a good idea. Why? Because you'll know the exchange rates and overseas charges in advance – both of which are bound to be lower than what you'll be charged if you use your credit or debit card. (The GE Money 28 Degrees MasterCard was the exception to this, prior to GE slapping on new overseas charges at the start of 2014.)

But if it's a quick trip and your total spend outside of hotels and air travel will be limited to $800 or so – and your ATM use will be minimal – a travel money card probably won't be cost-effective. Making 10 overseas ATM withdrawals with an Australia Post card and then closing the account, for instance, will cost you $35; spending $800 using a Commonwealth Bank debit or credit card, including two overseas ATM withdrawals of $200, will cost you $20.

Go to choice.com.au/travelmoney to find out:

- fees and charges for other travel money cards
- fees and charges if you use your regular bank card
- what happens to money left on a travel money card

Other travel money options

- The **Multi-Currency Cash Passport** (available branded as MasterCard or Travelex) doesn't charge overseas ATM fees, but it does charge a minimum of $15 for the card (or a maximum of 1.1% of the amount loaded) and $10 to close the account. If you loaded the maximum of $100,000, you'd pay a $1100 loading fee. And if you make any non-native transactions, you'll cop a hefty 5.95% margin above the MasterCard exchange rate. (With the Qantas Cash and Velocity Global Wallet cards, the extra margin for non-native transactions is a more tolerable 3%.) If you withdraw Australian dollars from an ATM back home, you'll get hit with a 2.95% fee. The Cash Passport also charges a $20 negative balance fee, but the airline cards don't.
- Along with the Cash Passport, the **NAB Traveller Card** doesn't charge overseas ATM fees, though it does charge you a $4 per month inactivity fee after a year and a $3.75 ATM fee if you use the card in Australia. The reloading fee is 1%, which can add up if you load a significant sum. The charge for currencies not loaded on the card is a substantial 4%.
- The **Citibank Plus Transaction account** can be a good travel money option, as it has no overseas ATM or purchase fees and no monthly fee. But you'll have to go to the trouble of opening an account before you travel, and if the overseas ATM is not operated by Citibank or an affiliated partner you will very likely be charged a fee by the local ATM operator.

What about other cards?

We also investigated the ins and outs of the rest of the travel card market, including the Australia Post Load & Go Travel Card, ANZ Travel Card, Westpac Global Currency Card, Commonwealth Bank Travel Money Card and American Express Global Travel card.

What we found:

- All these cards charge similar ATM fees for the currencies they cover and give comparable exchange rates. The exception was the **OzForex Travel Card**, which consistently offered better exchange rates, though they would be partially offset by a $15 purchase and $10 closing fee. OzForex says it applies a "super low" margin of 2.99%. During one of our checks, an OzForex customer would have received 18 more New Zealand dollars than a CBA travel card user on a $1000 load.

$35
The cost of 10 overseas ATM withdrawals with an Australia Post card
(plus account closure)

Choosing between cards comes down to currencies available, fees and how much you can load

- Loading and reloading fees can be tricky. They are generally either 1% or 1.1% except for Australia Post, which has no fee, and OzForex, which charges a flat $15. But some travel cards come with limits and some don't. With American Express, Commonwealth Bank and Westpac, the fees are capped at $10 or $15. With NAB, ANZ and the Cash Passport, there's no cap.
- Choosing between these cards should mainly come down to which currencies are available, which fees apply, and how much you can load at a time.

What's the exchange rate?

The Qantas Cash Product Disclosure Statement says you can find out about rates by going to qantascash.com. But it wasn't so simple when we had a go. In fact, we ended up having to call customer service; 20 minutes later, we finally found what we were looking for.

To find out how much your overseas cash is going to cost, click the "Why Qantas Cash?" tab on the qantascash.com home page and then pick "currencies" on the drop-down menu to find the current rates, which you can view even if you don't have an account.

Not so with Virgin's Velocity Global Wallet, where you're required to become a My Velocity Frequent Flyer member before you can check the rates. And it turns out that signing up online and getting a membership number, password and temporary printable card isn't enough. To gain access to the Global Wallet exchange rates, you must wait for the real card to arrive in the mail. That can take, in our case, 21 business days. In other words, you have to have a Virgin Global Wallet card in hand before you can see important details like exchange rates. We asked Virgin Australia Corporate HQ for access to the rates before our card arrived, but didn't get a response.

We tracked rates offered by Velocity Global Wallet, Qantas Cash and eight other travel money cards across four currencies – the euro, British pound and US and NZ dollars – over a few weeks (rates for the Thai baht weren't available).

There wasn't enough of a consistent exchange rate difference to make any one product stand out from the crowd, with the exception of OzForex – though they all take a nice little margin on top of the official exchange rate. (Rates for the Velocity Global Wallet change less frequently than those of the other cards – about every three days as opposed to daily – but they aren't any better.) ■

How embarrassing!

You're not the only one suffering from that unsightly condition, discovers **Zoya Sheftalovich**

Bodies can be pretty embarrassing and a little bit gross, smelly, loud and out of control. And, as much as we may trust our GP, it can be a bit tricky to open an appointment with "I've got an itch down there" or "How about those haemorrhoids?" CHOICE has delved beneath the covers on some of the more embarrassing maladies and ailments that might be making you squirm, to reveal what could be causing them and what you can do to resolve them.

Of course, the usual disclaimer applies: this is not exhaustive medical information, and some embarrassing symptoms might be the sign of an underlying serious illness. So even though it can be a pain in the proverbial, please see your doctor if symptoms persist.

1 Jock itch

What is it? Jock itch is a contagious fungal skin infection, officially known as tinea cruris. It generally presents as a rash on the groin area, mostly on men but sometimes on women, and generally isn't on the penis, scrotum or vagina (if you've got itching there, it could well be something else, perhaps thrush or a sexually transmitted disease, so make sure you get it checked out). It spreads from person to person either directly through skin-to-skin contact or through towels, clothes or floors. Fungal infections thrive in warm, moist areas, so sweat-prone areas like skin folds are the most likely places for tinea to take hold.

How can you treat it? Tinea can be treated with antifungal creams, but more stubborn infections may involve an oral antifungal medication.

2 Bad breath

What is it? We all know eating garlic before a first date is a bad idea, but some people seem to have a mouth odour problem regardless of diet. So what's up? Bacteria that live on the tongue and throat are generally the culprits behind bad breath, otherwise known as halitosis. In most cases the bacteria play nice, but in some people they work at super speed to break down proteins, and so-called odorous volatile sulphur compounds are released from the back of the tongue and throat. Halitosis can also be caused by poor oral hygiene, periodontitis, dry mouth or smoking, along with a host of other less common reasons.

How can you treat it? There's good news and bad news on treatment options. The bad news is there's no one way of fixing the problem, as it all depends on the underlying cause. The good news is there's a range of remedies to try, including drinking plenty of fluids,

IMAGES: THINKSTOCK & SHUTTERSTOCK

maintaining good dental practices like brushing and flossing, and cleaning your tongue using tongue brushes or scrapers. Specialty mouthwash may help, but if the underlying cause of your bad breath is dry mouth, avoid mint-flavoured mouthwash and lollies – these can aggravate dry mouth tissue. In some cases antibiotics may be needed to treat the bacteria on the tongue.

3 Haemorrhoids

What is it? Haemorrhoids are number three on our list because they often come after a number two. Boom tish! But seriously, haemorrhoids are the holy grail of embarrassing body conditions and actually come in three different forms: internal, prolapsed and external. They form when the blood flow in the vessels in and around the anus is hindered. Internal haemorrhoids are inside the rectum and are painless but tend to bleed, so you may become aware of them when you find a smear of blood on toilet paper. Prolapsed haemorrhoids are also internal but tend to be painful. They're caused by veins pushing through the anus and hanging out of the body. External haemorrhoids feel like hard lumps under the skin around the anus. Haemorrhoids are caused by a variety of factors, including constipation, pregnancy, manual labour, sitting on hard surfaces for extended periods of time and genetic factors.

How can you treat it? The main way to prevent and treat haemorrhoids is to avoid constipation. A high fibre diet and plenty of water helps produce soft bowel motions that are passed easily and regularly. Haemorrhoids can also be treated using astringent ointments or suppositories or with band ligation for internal haemorrhoids. In severe cases, surgery may be needed.

4 Constipation

What is it? Constipation, the parent problem of haemorrhoids, is when you have hard, dry poo that is infrequent or requires straining.

There are lots of different causes of constipation, including change in routine, low fibre diets, certain medication, pregnancy, age, illness or not enough fluids or exercise, although it can also be a symptom of more serious underlying illnesses such as tumours.

How can you treat it? Treatment for constipation depends on its cause, but includes changes to diet, increasing exercise, or removing the impacted faeces, potentially through enemas, stool softeners or laxatives.

5 Flatulence

What is it? Like death and taxes, farts are an inevitable part of life. Flatulence is the discharge of intestinal gas – a completely normal digestive process. Depending on diet, some people may fart just a few times a day while others may be veritable wind machines, letting one off up to 40 times. The quantity and quality of your farts will depend on a range of factors, including how high in fibre your diet is. That being said, excessive flatulence accompanied by other symptoms such as extensive bloating could be a sign of lactose intolerance, short-chain carbohydrate intolerance or irritable bowel syndrome.

How can you treat it? If you're just dealing with garden-variety gassiness, there's not much to be done apart from perhaps investing in a room deodoriser or a peg or two for your nearest and dearest. To prevent gassiness caused by a change to a higher-fibre diet, it's a good idea to introduce additional fibre gradually, allowing your body some time to adjust. But if you suspect you might be dealing with an underlying issue, get it checked out.

6 Incontinence

What is it? Incontinence is no fun, unlike the many activities that can lead to it. Sneezing, trampolines, hilarious friends – these are all dangerous if you have a tendency to leak urine or faeces. Incontinence affects millions of people of all ages in Australia and can be caused by everything from having a baby to diabetes, so it really shouldn't be such a big deal. But because it's so embarrassing, people may not seek help for something that can, in many cases, be treated effectively.

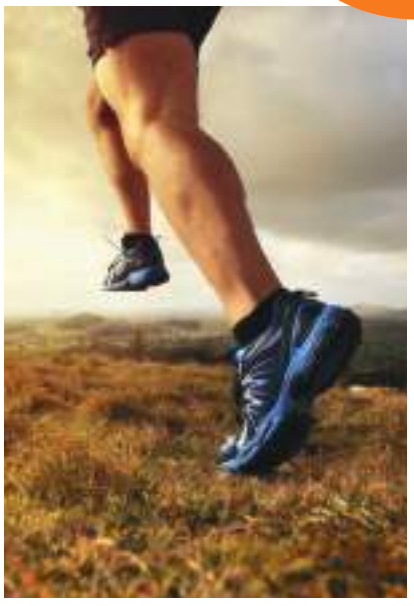
How can you treat it? Depending on what's causing your incontinence, you

can use a management plan, medication, pelvic floor muscle exercises, dietary changes or botulinum toxin (Botox) injections. If you want to speak with someone about incontinence before you head to your doctor, you can call the National Continence Helpline on 1800 330 066.

7 Athlete's foot

What is it? Athlete's foot, another form of tinea, is a fungal infection that likes to live between your toes and on the arch of the foot. You may develop small blisters on your feet, and the skin may become red, moist and itchy. Athlete's foot is very easy to catch, particularly if you're living with others, walking around barefoot in a locker room or using the showers at the gym.

How can you treat it? The best way to treat athlete's foot is to avoid catching it, meaning you should wear shoes in public areas and thongs in public showers, and not share towels. But if you do pick it up, you can treat it with anti-fungals.



About **50%** of people are affected by dandruff

8 Ingrown toenails

What is it? Ingrown toenails are caused by nails, particularly on the big toe, becoming cracked or frayed and forming sharp edges that push into the skin. As a result, the area can become infected, swollen and painful. Causes include wearing badly-fitting shoes, poor nail-cutting technique or a naturally abnormal nail shape.

How can you treat it? To avoid getting ingrown nails in the first place make sure you don't cut nails into the corners and keep them smooth so no spikes are left behind. It's also important to wear the right size shoes that aren't too tight. If you do have ingrown nails, you may need to see a doctor or specialist for medication or, in worst-case scenarios, surgery.

9 Dandruff

What is it? Dandruff is a very common problem affecting roughly half of all people. Skin all over the body, including on the scalp, is constantly being shed and renewed, and when things are running well you won't notice anything out of the ordinary. But inflammation of the scalp may cause cells to stick together and clump, meaning that when the skin is shed, it becomes visible and unsightly. And before you know it, you're banishing all black clothes to the back of the closet.

How can you treat it? Anti-dandruff shampoo is your friend. Regular washing of the hair using a shampoo that contains zinc pyrithione, zinc omadine, selenium sulphide or piroctone olamine, or in some cases tar-based shampoos, can usually get the situation under control. Interestingly, according to Better Health Victoria, dandruff sufferers should match their anti-dandruff shampoo and conditioner, as unmatched conditioners may inactivate the active ingredient in the shampoo. ■

Money back not guaranteed

Jodi Bird investigates how to claw back your hard-earned holiday money if your travel agent goes bust

If your online or bricks-and-mortar travel agent has taken your money but gone broke before they handed the funds over to the airlines and hotels you've booked, which travel insurance policies will reimburse you for lost funds?

The answer is precisely none. And since the Travel Compensation Fund is being wound down, there's now even less protection for consumers if travel agents go bust. Travel agents can take out their own insolvency insurance, but this is optional, so make sure you ask what steps they've taken to protect your funds.

If your travel agent goes broke and leaves you out of pocket, are you able to get your money back some other way?

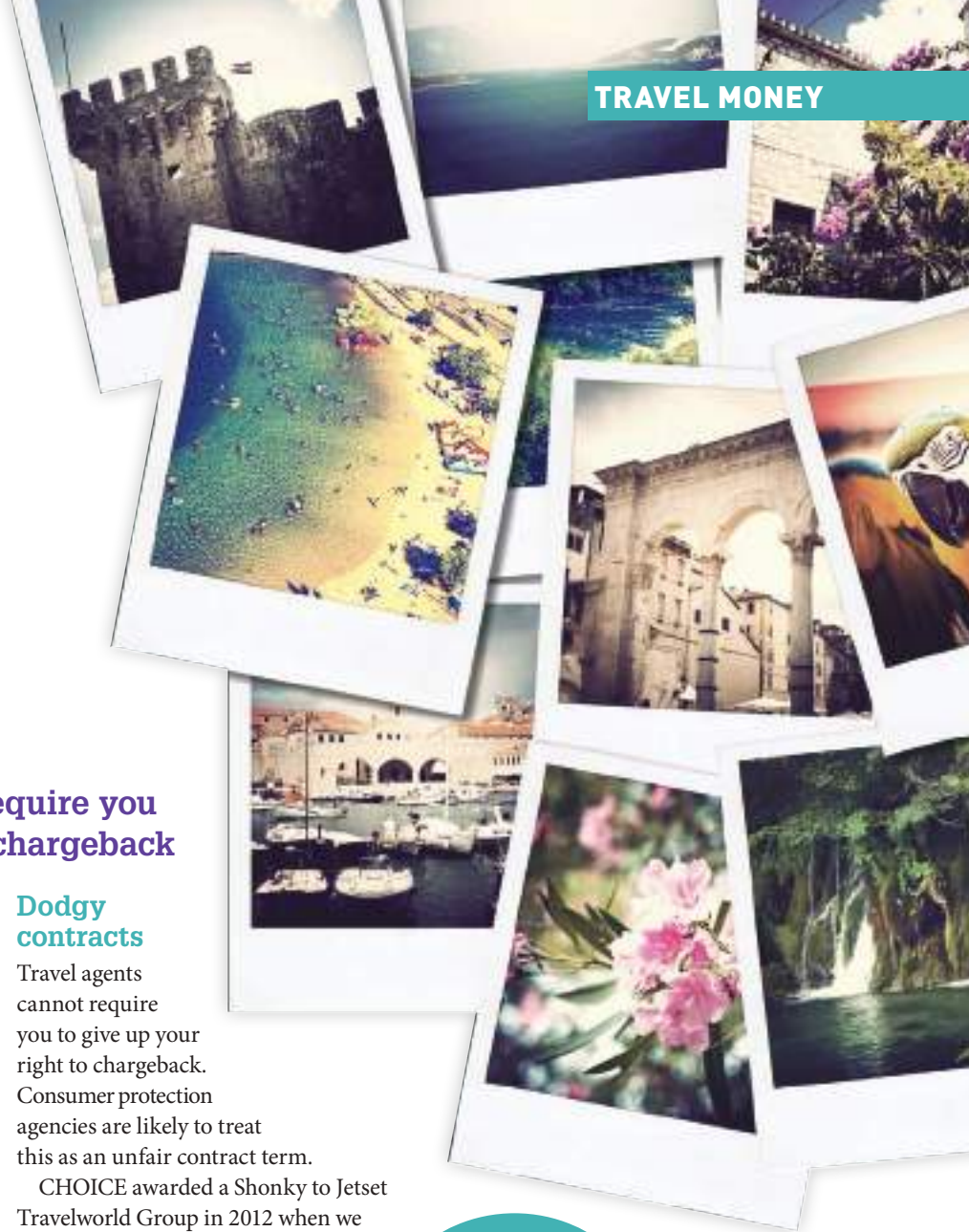
Credit card chargeback

If you've booked using a credit or debit card (and you selected "credit" when you paid) then you can ask your bank for a chargeback. Your bank reverses a disputed transaction back to the merchant's bank in accordance with card scheme rules set by Visa, MasterCard or American Express. This means the money goes back onto your credit card.

0
number of travel policies that cover you if your travel agent goes bust

There are time limits imposed on your bank by these card schemes, though, so be on your guard as soon as you've handed over your cash, and act fast if you realise something has gone wrong:

- Stay in contact with your travel agent after you've booked so you're the first to know when the phone line has gone dead.
- Keep documentation of your payment



and correspondence with the agent.
- Ask your bank for a chargeback as soon as you notice something is wrong.
- Write to them asking for a chargeback and include a copy of all the documentation.

How long have you got?

The timeframes vary, depending on your bank, the card issuer and the transaction type. The credit card terms and conditions of most banks will simply instruct you to let them know as soon as possible, noting your right to a chargeback will expire after a timeframe imposed by the credit card scheme. But be aware that some banks, such as HSBC, set their own shorter timeframe of 30 days after the date of the statement on which the transaction is recorded.

Travel agents cannot require you to give up your right to chargeback

Your reason for requesting a chargeback can also determine the amount of time you have before your right to chargeback expires. Some of the top chargeback reasons are:
- Unauthorised mail/telephone transaction – a telephone sales person got your credit card number and used it without your permission.
- Duplicate processing – you were charged twice, or more, for a single purchase.
- Merchandise not received by purchaser – your credit card statement claims you bought something but you've got nothing to show for it.
- Posting direct debits – you cancelled a credit card direct debit, but the money is still being debited from the card.

If the reason for your chargeback is "services not provided or merchandise not received" under the Visa card scheme rules, for example, you have 120 calendar days from the transaction processing date until your chargeback rights expire.

Dodgy contracts

Travel agents cannot require you to give up your right to chargeback. Consumer protection agencies are likely to treat this as an unfair contract term.

CHOICE awarded a Shonky to Jetset Travelworld Group in 2012 when we found their booking terms and conditions required you to waive your right to chargeback. They subsequently amended their T&Cs to remove any mention of the word 'chargeback'.

To be safe, don't accept any contract terms that require you to give up chargeback rights. ■

840
pages in the Visa card scheme rules

What if the airline or hotel goes broke?

So what happens if your travel agent doesn't go broke but your provider does? You've still got a right to chargeback within the specified timeframes and there are some travel insurance policies that will cover "insolvency of a travel provider", but you'll need to check the fine print in your policy. In our most recent travel insurance review, only eight out of 30 insurers covered this situation.

IMAGE: ISTOCK PHOTO

Signed, sealed, delivered

Sending packages abroad can often cost as much as the trinket you're sending. **Jemma Castle** takes a look at the alternatives

If you've ever packaged up presents to send to loved ones abroad, you probably got a shock when told the price at the post office. But with the boom in online shopping, Australia Post now competes with several other parcel providers. But are there some viable alternatives to Australia Post for international parcels?

To find out, we sent some Tim Tams to an expat in the US through five different postal providers to see how long each took to ship. We also checked prices for a range of locations and parcel weights (see the table on p32).

What we found

- For **lightweight packages** (up to 5kg), Australia Post was generally the cheapest (and most straightforward). But SkippyPost was slightly cheaper on certain routes.
- For **heavier packages** (over 5kg), there were cheaper deals with couriers or parcel brokers.
- If booking through an online provider, you'll need to have a means of knowing the **weight and dimensions** of the package and have **access to a printer**.
- Parcel pick-ups can be convenient if you can't get to a post office during opening hours, but they also lock you into waiting around until it's picked up.
- **Redelivery costs,** which can be charged when the recipient isn't home, can increase the cost of the parcel. Some of the alternative postal providers charge for redelivery.

Australia Post

As the national postal provider, Australia Post has a range of post offices in cities and regional areas. Unlike letter prices, parcel prices aren't regulated and are subject to a competitive environment.

We sent Tim Tams to an expat in the United States using five different postal providers

- **Cost** For parcels up to 1kg Australia Post is generally the cheapest, but if your parcel is 5kg or more it pays to shop around. Prices are determined based on weight.
- **Lodgement experience** Straightforward, but you need access to a post office. International parcels must be lodged at the post office and a customs declaration needs to be filled out.
- **How many days for Tim Tams to arrive?** 8-9 business days.
- **Deliveries** are dealt with by the

national postal service in the destination country.
- **Cover for loss and damage** isn't included unless it's registered, but you can generally purchase Extra Cover.

8-9 days
how many business days it took for our packet of Tim Tams to arrive at its destination using Australia Post

2-3 days
how many business days it took to transport our Tim Tams using some other providers

SkippyPost

SkippyPost positions itself as a bulk economy airmail service, sending mail to 237 countries around the world. It aggregates mail to tap into a range of deals with mail services like Singapore Post and New Zealand Post to insert parcels into the international mail system.

As SkippyPost doesn't market itself to one-off customers, it charges a $9 shipment fee on top of the postage price (which can include up to 32 parcels or a total limit of 20kg) to encourage bulk shipments.
- **Cost** If you're sending a few parcels at once and speed isn't your need, it's a cost-effective way to send international mail. And if you're only sending one parcel, we still found it significantly cheaper for heavier packages (5kg and up) to New Zealand. Prices are determined based on weight, although large parcels use volumetric weight.
- **Lodgement experience** Relatively straightforward but the process has a few steps. Parcels are posted in a post box or at a post office, after completing the lodgement online. For the online part, you need to register for an account, pay for your shipment and print off the labels, including a customs declaration. The parcel is then sent to SkippyPost via Australia Post using a reply paid address. You'll need to double-wrap the package – once for the international leg with shipping labels attached, and then again for the domestic leg with the shipping manifest included and reply paid labels on the outer wrapping.
- **How many days for Tim Tams to arrive?** 11-12 business days.
- **Deliveries** are generally dealt with by the national postal service in the destination country.
- **Cover for loss and damage** isn't included, but a loss-cover warranty for loss or damage up to a value of $500 can be purchased on items which have SkippyTracker. It doesn't include the reply paid leg so you'd need to purchase Extra Cover through Australia Post.

Pack & Send

Pack & Send is a global courier offering international one-off shipments for customers.
- **Cost** For heavier packages it's cheaper than Australia Post, but we didn't find it the cheapest. Prices are charged based on whichever is greater out of weight or volume.
- **Lodgement experience** Parcels are lodged online and labels and customs forms printed at home before being picked up (by DHL in our test). For certain items you may need to drop it off at a service centre (limited outside city centres). Bookings need to be made the day before collection. A specific time slot can't be selected which means you'll need to be around the whole day (9am-5pm). Also beware of extra charges: booking alteration charge ($20), incorrect weight charge ($10), futile booking charge ($20), and waiting time for driver after 10 minutes ($100 an hour charged in five minute increments).
- **How many days for Tim Tams to arrive?** 2-3 business days.
- **Delivery** To the door. But beware the $15 redelivery charge if the recipient isn't there to collect the parcel.
- **Cover for loss and damage** isn't included but a Loss & Damage Protection Warranty can be purchased.

Interparcel

Many of the big couriers don't provide services to one-off customers. Interparcel works to fill that gap, operating as a parcel broker between individuals and courier companies such as UPS, TNT and FedEx.
- **Cost** For heavier parcels (5kg and up) there are savings to be made, especially to the UK and Hong Kong.
- **Lodgement experience** Parcels are lodged online and labels and customs

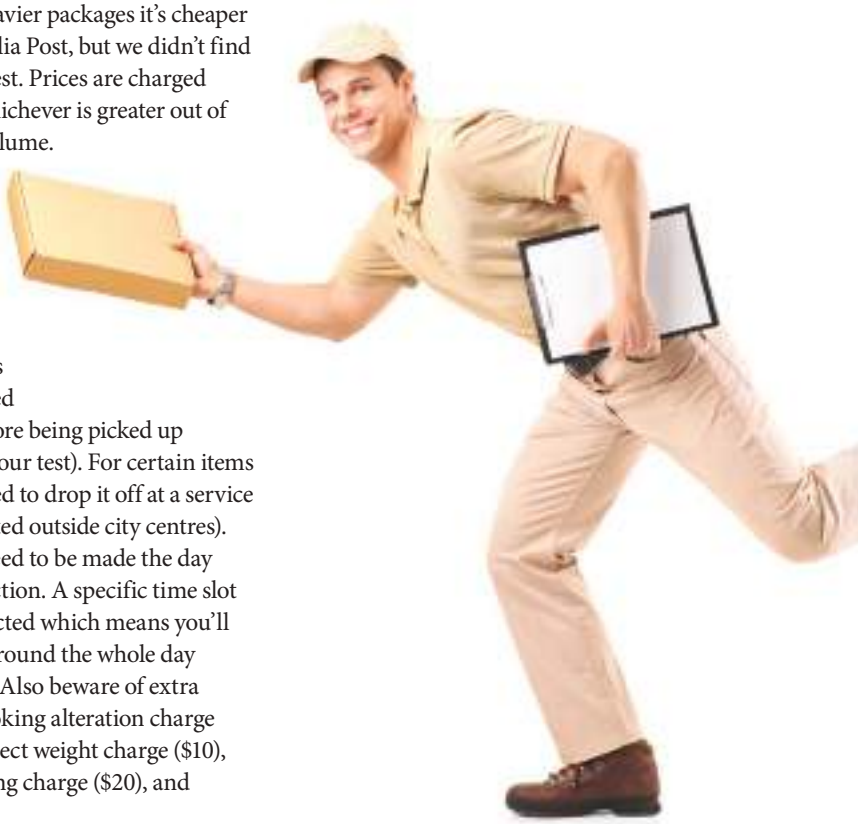


IMAGE: THINKSTOCK

forms printed at home before being picked up (by TNT in our test). Same-day bookings can be made with collections until 5.30pm, but you need to leave a two-hour collection window. We booked this service around 2.30 and it was picked up by around 4pm. Also beware of extra charges: booking alteration ($10), incorrect weight ($10 +GST), and futile booking ($10).

- **How many days for Tim Tams to arrive?** 2-3 business days.
- **Delivery** To the door, but if the recipient is not available to collect the goods, there may be a redelivery fee, depending on the provider.
- **Cover for loss and damage** is included with cover for items up to $100 in value and you can purchase extra if you need it.

Ship 2 Anywhere

Ship 2 Anywhere has partnered with DHL Express to enable customers to make one-off shipments with them.

- **Cost** For heavier parcels (5kg and up) to the US we found it to be the cheapest. Prices are based on weight or volumetric weight, whichever is greater.
- **Lodgement experience** Parcels are lodged online with labels and customs forms printed at home before being picked up (by DHL in our test). Same-day booking can be made up until 2pm (a four-hour collection window is needed); anything after that is automatically carried over to the next day. However, despite booking just before 2pm, our booking was still carried over until the next day.
- **How many days for Tim Tams to arrive?** 2-3 business days.
- **Delivery** To the door. If the recipient isn't home, a calling card is left and they can either redirect it or arrange a redelivery.
- **Cover for loss or damage** is included for free up to the value of $200 and you can purchase extra if needed. ■

$161.23

lowest price among the services we compared for sending a 20kg package to the US (Ship2Anywhere)

	Australia Post	Skippy Post*	Pack & Send	eparcel.com.au	Ship 2 Anywhere
500g to US	**$14.10**	$20.32	$46.02	$49.04	$42.48
500g to UK*	$18.20	**$28.83**	$46.07	$49.04	$56.66
500g to HONG KONG	**$12.25**	$19.77	$41.00	$34.47	$66.28
500g to NZ	**$10.55**	$16.42	$34.68	$35.48	$39.15
1kg to US	**$29.70**	$29.78	$46.02	$49.04	$42.48
1kg to UK	$39.10	**$36.31**	$56.10	$49.04	$56.66
1kg to HONG KONG	**$25.30**	$29.42	$52.97	$34.47	$66.28
1kg to NZ*	$21.15	**$20.43**	$42.22	$35.48	$39.15
5kg to US	$104.00	$106.49	$109.21	$107.94	**$97.26**
5kg to UK*	$135.30	$106.49	$128.04	**$107.94**	$120.34
5kg to HONG KONG	$81.40	$69.95	$107.29	**$55.71**	$117.92
5kg to NZ	$67.25	**$35.33**	$80.79	$67.86	$76.22
20kg to US	$339.50	$329.69	$179.38	$172.34	**$161.23**
20kg to UK	$432.30	$329.69	$231.46	**$172.34**	$197.27
20kg to HONG KONG	$249.40	$218.61	$200.81	**$143.46**	$186.44
20kg to NZ	$208.25	**$82.45**	$139.70	$110.96	$118.24

***Price includes $9 shipment fee**

DIMENSIONS USED FOR PRICING

- **500g** 21x28x 5cm
- **1kg** 22x16x8cm
- **5kg** 31x22x10cm
- **20kg** 43x30x30cm

Going to great lengths

Eyelash extensions are the latest beauty fad to hit Australia, but just how safe are they? **Kate Browne** investigates

Walk past any beauty salon or nail bar, and it's hard to miss the advertisements promising longer, fuller eyelashes that can last up to six weeks – all without a tube of mascara in sight.

As the festive season rolls around, it's easy to see the appeal in a treatment that can have you looking as long-lashed as Bambi, day after day. But there are concerns that a lack of training by those applying eyelash extensions could put the customer's eyes at risk.

CHOICE investigates this growing trend to see what it's all about, what the risks are, and what to look out for if you decide eyelash extensions are for you.

What are they?

While false eyelashes have been part of many a woman's beauty kit for decades, the new craze is for semi-permanent eyelash extensions. Unlike regular false eyelashes, where you have synthetic lashes applied to your eyelid, which are (easily) removed afterwards, eyelash extensions are applied directly to the natural eyelash with a bonding agent, and can last (with care) for up to six weeks. While this means you can leap out of bed looking like a celebrity without touching a mascara wand, the downside could be an eye infection – or something worse, if the person applying the lashes hasn't had adequate training or isn't using the right equipment.

Lack of training by those performing eyelash extensions could put the customer's eyes at risk

The cost of the extensions can vary depending on who you see and what products they use, but you can expect to pay between roughly $70 and $300 for a full set.

Bad lashes

Many of the experts we spoke to said that although eyelash extensions are readily available, there are plenty of things to consider before you hit the chair.

Andrea Day, a beauty educator with the College of Health and Biomedicine at ▸

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Victoria University, says while the trend started with celebrities, the rush for longer lashes has quickly been embraced by the public – and by the beauty industry, as it can be lucrative for salons. The downside, however, is that when it comes to safety, "enthusiasm has almost completely quashed scepticism by the general public".

The main issue is lack of staff training and experience in applying the extensions – which, in combination with a body part as delicate as the eye, can at times end in disaster.

Veteran lash specialist Samantha Barnes says her dedicated lash extension business, The Lash Lounge, was one of the first to offer the service in Sydney five years ago. Now, she says, there are hundreds of beauty businesses and even nail salons offering eyelash extensions, often at heavily discounted rates and with little experience in the practice. As a result she says she's been inundated with customers seeking her help after having a poor experience elsewhere:

"I've had clients come in with severe damage to their natural lash, horrible infections, experiences where they have been in pain throughout the procedure, [have had] their eyes glued shut and more," she says.

"I've had clients come in with severe damage to their natural lash, horrible infections... and more."

Barnes says some of the more common problems she sees from shoddy lash jobs include red eyes and chemical burns from poor ventilation when the adhesive is applied, and eyelashes stuck together from too much glue stunting growth of the natural lashes, causing pain and styes. She also sees plenty of clients who have had heavy and long extensions applied that eventually pull out the natural lashes, which can result in permanent lash loss.

Damage done

Dr Tasha Micheli, chair of the NSW Branch of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists, says eye doctors are seeing a small but increasing parade of patients who have suffered injuries as a result of lash extensions.

She says the main problem resulting from the procedure is with foreign bodies getting into the eye and causing corneal ulcers, which can lead to vision loss.

"Shards from the eyelash fibres can scratch the cornea and leave the fine fibres (which are mink or silk) behind. You really won't be able to see them yourself but it doesn't mean they aren't there."

Melbourne-based optometrist Samantha Day says she doesn't recommend eyelash extensions at all when her patients ask about them. "Even for people who have never had an eye problem before, using lash extensions may cause an eye disorder and this can occur in up to one in four people who use them. Most problems will resolve with treatment and without causing permanent vision loss, however, there may be a permanent loss of natural lashes."

Where's the training?

An eyelash extension treatment gone wrong can put your eyes in serious peril. Despite this, there are currently no training requirements in Australia, so in theory anyone can set up a business or sideline in applying lash extensions.

According to Day, "in order to do business, those providing the service need to adhere to local, state or territory, and federal Work Health and Safety (WHS)

Serious risks of eyelash extensions

Keratoconjunctivitis An infection or inflammation of the cornea and conjunctiva, due to glue or removing agent leaking into the eye during application or removal.

Allergic blepharitis Inflammation of the lids, as a result of an allergic reaction to the glue, particularly to the formaldehyde in the glue, or an allergy to the eyelid fixing tape used during the procedure.

Conjunctival erosion from the eyelid fixing tape and a risk of sub-conjunctival haemorrhage (bleeding under the conjunctiva) from compression on the eye during lash extension removal.

Traction alopecia Where the natural lashes fall out due to the weight of repeated eyelash extension treatments. In some cases the lashes may not regrow.

guidelines and legislation; however, training is not a legal requirement". The beauty industry often has to keep up with new techniques and products, and with consultation underway, it's pushing to have a nationally recognised qualification for eyelash technicians next year.

In the meantime, if you're still keen to give the treatment a try, Day recommends seeking out an eyelash technician who holds a nationally recognised make-up qualification, including the WHS skills to apply temporary false lashes. Technicians with a Certificate II in Retail, Make-up and Skin Care, Certificate III in Beauty Services, or a Certificate IV or Diploma in Beauty Therapy have been, at the very least, trained and assessed according to fixed criteria in 'applying standard infection control precautions' and 'recognising and managing contraindications and adverse effects' when applying temporary false eyelashes.

The higher the level of qualification, the more skilled a technician is in infection control, including hand-washing techniques, disinfecting the tweezers and preparation of the work area.

What else to look for

Before

- Look for a practitioner or salon that's well established and provides lash extensions as their primary business.
- Ask to see the products being used. Read the label of the product to check for any chemicals being used that you may be allergic to. The adhesive used should be 'pharmaceutical grade' and be safe for use on the eye area.
- The lashes themselves are usually advertised as synthetic, silk or mink. A softer, lighter fibre such as mink will put less tension on the hair follicle.
- Make sure they use a fan to keep fumes away from your eyes at the workstation and that they 'cure' each lash, either with a mist of isopropyl alcohol at the end of the application, or by rinsing the eyes straight afterward so no adhesive residue remains on the lashes.
- Consider having an allergy test done first. Allergies aren't that common, but it's better to be safe than sorry

After

- Follow the aftercare advice given by the practitioner: if you want to go swimming or use mascara on your extensions, check first as this can vary depending on the kind of procedure you've had done.
- See a health professional if you experience any discomfort or irritation. A problem with your eye can quickly go from bad to worse so don't wait. An ophthalmologist (eye specialist) is the best choice, although you'll need a referral from your GP.

Short changed on long lashes

CASE STUDY

Sydney CHOICE reader Joanna told us that, after choosing a beautician who said she was "officially accredited", she had lash extensions applied in time for her hen's night. She planned to have these touched up before her wedding. After sitting through the two-hour application process, she says she was encouraged to buy maintenance products that brought the total cost up to $400. However, despite following the aftercare instructions carefully she says by the time she woke up the next morning most of the applied lashes had already fallen off. Three days after application, all had fallen out.

When she spoke to the beautician she was offered a replacement treatment, but for Joanna, this was too late for her wedding. She asked for a refund on the unused beauty products and was told she could have store credit on one item and no refunds. While Joanna was keen to take things further, she says she got swept up in her wedding and didn't take any further action.

In this particular case, under Australian Consumer Law, Joanna certainly could have pursued this issue with the salon or via Fair Trading, and requested a refund.

Think twice about getting eyelash extensions if you:

- have sparse lashes
- can't afford the time or money for regular maintenance
- have known allergies to an ingredient in the adhesive or are allergy-prone
- are pregnant. ■

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Natural instinct?

When it comes to natural and organic cosmetics, you might not be getting what you're paying for, says **Karina Bray**

Sales of natural and organic cosmetics and personal care products are growing. Many consumers think products with these labels are better or safer than regular cosmetics, and are prepared to pay a premium for them. There are a number of natural and organic certifiers who uphold the standards you can expect from these products. This can give you some reassurance you're getting what you're paying for. But watch out for the ones with 'natural' or 'organic' pretensions that wouldn't meet even the most lenient of standards.

We show you how to pick the genuine products, highlight some tricks and traps, and consider whether natural or organic cosmetics are actually any better than their "chemical" counterparts.

Off the shelf

A quick look around the shelves of your local pharmacy or supermarket reveals there are plenty of products that appear natural and/or organic, based on their branding, label claims and imagery. But consumers should be wary of marketing claims that a product contains natural or organic ingredients – and of paying a price premium for them – when the ingredient is actually a very small proportion of the final product.

PAWPAW OINTMENT is mostly petroleum jelly

100% GEL but not 100% Aloe Vera gel. Contains ingredients prohibited in natural standards – and even in some countries!

GOATS MILK HANDWASH contains more salt than goat's milk

ST IVES Containing, last AND least, apricot extract

100% VIRGIN OLIVE OIL... apart from all the other ingredients

NATURE'S ORGANICS doesn't contain any certified organic ingredients

STANDARDS & CERTIFICATION

Your best bet for finding natural or organic cosmetics is to look for certification. There are many different certifiers in the market place – here are some of the main ones you'll find in Australia.

COSMOS is an international standard for organic and natural cosmetics. Founded in 2010 as a collaboration between five European organic certification bodies, it's now global. It's a relatively new standard, so the logo isn't widely seen at the moment, but it is likely to become more visible in coming years.

- **COSMOS Organic**: Contains a minimum of 95% certified organic ingredients of biological (plant or animal) origin. Water, salts and minerals aren't counted as organic, so this calculation is based on the other ingredients, which are mostly plant and animal products. At least 20% of the total product must be organic, except for mineral makeup and wash-off products (and others with a high water content) for which the minimum percentage is 10%. As well, there must be no genetically modified or irradiated ingredients, nanoparticles or animal testing. Animal products (such as beeswax or honey) can be used, but not parts of dead animals. The packaging also has to meet certain requirements.
- **COSMOS Natural**: The standard for natural ingredients stipulates which ingredients are permitted and how they're processed. The product doesn't have to be 100% natural – instead, the percentage of "natural" ingredients is listed, and these can include water, salts and minerals.

Australian Certified Organic has two certification categories for organic cosmetics:

- **Certified organic**: Contains a minimum of 95% certified organic ingredients (excluding salts and water) and up to 5% other approved ingredients.
- **Made with certified organic ingredients**: Contains 70–95% certified organic ingredients (excluding salts and water) with the remainder being from approved non-organic sources.

Australian Certified Organic also certifies products on behalf of COSMOS, so you may see both logos on some products.

The **NSF** "contains organic ingredients" standard is a US national standard for personal care products that make organic ingredient claims. Products must undergo a thorough review by an independent organic certification organisation to verify the product contains at least 70% organic content by weight.

Natrue is an international certifier for natural and organic cosmetics and skin care products, with locally based certifiers in various countries. Only water, natural ingredients, derived natural ingredients and nature-identical ingredients are permitted. There are three levels of certification: natural; natural with organic ingredients (70% or more organic ingredients); and organic (95% or more organic ingredients).

These are the main certifiers for the products we came across. Other organic certifiers include Soil Association (UK), BioGro (NZ), Ecocert (France), OFC, BDIH (Germany), Cosmebio (France), ICEA (Italy), Natural Products Association (US) and USDA Organic (US). You may see one or more of these logos on the packaging – a company may apply to different organisations for certification according to the markets in which they sell.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Aveeno ACTIVE NATURALS

Positively Radiant Skin Brightening Daily Scrub

The exfoliating microbeads in this scrub are an environmental problem – and not at all natural. Made from polyethylene, these tiny plastic balls end up in the sewage system and pass through the treatment system filters into the treated waste water stream and into our rivers and oceans. They've been found in the gut and tissue of fish and other aquatic animals such as shellfish, with unknown consequences for the animals and people who eat them.

Johnson and Johnson, the distributor of Aveeno, is one of several companies committed to phasing microbeads out of their products by 2017.

nvey eco

Powder Blush

Despite being an Australian company making products in Australia, Nvey Eco has chosen to use Natrue and NSF certification because it felt the standards are more stringent, and that this would reflect better on the quality of their products and the ingredients. In addition, because they're selling mainly overseas, it helps to have internationally recognised certification.

sukin

Hand & Nail Cream

Sukin Organics produces products made from plant-based ingredients and excludes many chemicals, such as parabens, SLS, SLES, mineral oil, and propylene glycol. However, with the exception of its rosehip oil, it doesn't claim any certified organic ingredients.

NIVEA pure & natural

Moisturing day cream

This moisturising day cream has ingredients that are "95% of natural origin". The main ingredients in moisturisers are generally water, fat, glycerine and alcohol, which are all readily available from natural sources, so it's not difficult to achieve 95% natural origin.

But "non-natural" ingredients from petrochemical sources, such as paraffin, mineral oil and petrolatum, are often used in moisturising products for dermatitis and eczema, due to their non-irritating nature.

Neutrogena naturals

Fresh cleansing + makeup remover

Some ingredients are derived from palm oil, which some shoppers avoid for ethical reasons. Neutrogena is a signatory to the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, and buys GreenPalm certificates to cover its use in products.

It contains ingredients that sound like synthetic chemicals, but we're reassured they're 'naturally derived'; so cocamidopropyl betaine is derived from coconuts and guar hydroxypropyl-trimonium chloride from guar bean – though petrochemicals are used in processes required to turn the natural ingredient into a cosmetic chemical.

This doesn't mean they're 'bad' (see Are chemicals really that bad?, above right), and both are permitted ingredients in the COSMOS standard – though guar hydroxypropyltrimonium chloride is permitted in hair products only, not cleansers. But they're clearly not as 'natural' as squeezing coconuts and vegetables into a bottle.

BURT'S BEES

Lip Shimmer

Burt's Bees Lip Shimmer claims to be '100% Natural' , though the packaging doesn't carry any

Are chemicals really that bad?

There are clearly degrees of 'naturalness', with many natural cosmetics ingredients undergoing some form of processing. Even petroleum-based ingredients come from a source that was once 'natural' and, as any chemist will tell you, 'organic'!

"The word 'chemicals' tends to have a fearful, negative connotation among consumers, but in truth, everything around us is composed of chemicals," says Bryan Barron from Paula's Choice. "Just like there are good and bad natural and synthetic ingredients, there are good and bad chemicals. There are lots of great natural ingredients just as there are lots of great synthetic ingredients – the best products utilise both to the consumer's advantage!"

certification. Past testing by the US Food and Drug Administration found traces of lead in Burt's Bees Lip Shimmer products, which raised concerns among natural cosmetics proponents. However, as Burt's Bees has pointed out, lead is a potential contaminant in the natural mineral sources used for lip colouring, and while the amounts present are too low to present any risk, it says it's continually working to minimise or eliminate lead traces.

La Mav
ORGANIC SKIN SCIENCE

Sunkissed Bronzer

La Mav Sunkissed Bronzer contains certified organic ingredients, as well as minerals. The certifier is Organic Food Chain (OFC), though this isn't mentioned on the packaging. It also states – on its website – that it's 'Australian Government Certified'. This just means that OFC is recognised by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service as an organic certifier.

Rose Water

Perfect Potion products are certified by COSMOS, but many still carry the logos of Germany's BDIH – one of the founding COSMOS members – or Australian Certified Organic. The company is currently migrating to COSMOS certification.

THE BODY SHOP NUTRIGANICS

Smoothing eye cream

The original fair-trade, eco-conscious mainstream brand, with its fruity and flowery fragrances packing a natural punch since 1976, has recently come to the natural certification party: its organic range, Nutriganics, is certified by Ecocert.

Is 'natural' really better?

Some people are drawn to natural cosmetics because their skin is sensitive or reacts to certain ingredients. The main culprits are fragrances and preservatives, and if specific chemicals cause you problems, it makes sense to avoid them. But natural cosmetics may not always be a better choice. Many natural ingredients can cause skin reactions and allergies, including lavender, tea tree oil and essential oils. Citrus oils can sensitise skin to sun damage, causing redness, swelling and blisters. And products containing lavender and tea tree oils have been linked with hormone disruption in boys. Alarmingly, people can develop food allergies after being sensitised to ingredients found in cosmetics. There have been reports of people developing food allergies to goat milk and cheese after using goat milk soap or moisturiser. Other reports have linked food allergies to skin care products containing almond oil, peanut, wheat and oats.

Professor Robyn O'Hehir, director of the Alfred Hospital's Department of Allergy, Immunology & Respiratory Medicine, tells us it's mainly a concern for certain people with a predisposition to allergies, especially if the skin is broken or inflamed due to eczema. She recommends that these people avoid products containing food allergens. "While unlikely to be a problem for most people, with intact skin providing an effective barrier to the underlying immune system, application of these 'natural' products containing food allergens to eczematous skin may lead to a severe allergic reaction when the food is eaten subsequently."

$30bn+
Global natural cosmetics sales

Another major concern about natural cosmetics is microbial contamination and spoilage. In 2013 the ACCC recalled three 'natural' cosmetic products due to microbial contamination. While there are some natural preservatives, certification standards often allow for certain 'safe' synthetic preservatives.

At the very least, take note of any storage or use-by instructions. Bryan Barron, content and research director at Paula's Choice, says, "Natural products, whether certified organic or not, absolutely have a shorter shelf life compared to regular cosmetics. They should be treated more carefully, and some brands require refrigeration or very small sizes to avoid premature spoilage".

Ask the Experts

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

Q I'm planning on buying a new phone and I'm weighing up the benefit of the 'Blue Tick' versus 4G speed. Reception is my number one priority because we live in an urban valley with poor reception (but it's not rural). What difference does the Blue Tick make in this case? And is 4G really going to make a noticeable difference in speed?

Denis Gallagher

A CHOICE digital home content producer Denis Gallagher replies: I wouldn't be making any decisions on reception performance (for making phone calls) on the 4G performance results. 4G is related to the data performance when in range of a 4G tower. When you do get 4G you'll notice a big difference in speed for downloading files or watching video on the web, but not clearer phone calls; this is determined by the 3G performance (shown in the reception performance column in our tests).

The Blue Tick program invites companies to submit phones for testing by Telstra to ensure they perform to a certain level. We've found that all the Blue Tick phones have performed well in CHOICE tests. But we've also found several phones without a Blue Tick that performed as well, if not better, out in the field.

Q I've heard pregnancy is not covered by insurance if you travel after 26 weeks, even though the airline might let you fly until 32 weeks. What questions should I ask my insurer if I want to fly while pregnant?

A CHOICE finance specialist Jodi Bird replies: Ask your insurer these questions:

- Do you cover pregnancy complications? (Several don't.)
- Up until which stage of the pregnancy? – Those that do will only cover pregnancy complications for up to 20 to 30 weeks.
- Do you cover childbirth up until this stage of pregnancy? – Not all will cover childbirth up till this stage of pregnancy so a premature baby birth in the US with intensive care and treatment for several months could cost hundreds of thousands.
- Do I have to pay extra or do I need medical approval to be covered?
- Do you cover IVF pregnancies? In our survey of insurers (*CHOICE* Nov 14), AIG, Good2Go and Jetstar provide the best coverage for pregnancy, with natural and IVF pregnancies covered up until 26 weeks, and childbirth covered up until this stage of pregnancy at no extra cost.

Jodi Bird

Ask us!

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at **asktheexperts@choice.com.au** or write to us at:
Ask the Experts, CHOICE,
57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville,
NSW 2204.
We regret that we cannot reply to all correspondence.

Q Why do TVs specify 100Hz or 200Hz? I've noticed there's a big price difference for higher rates.

Scott O'Keefe

A CHOICE TV expert Scott O'Keefe replies: When it comes to TVs, Hz are 'cycles per second'. When you see a figure of 100Hz or 200Hz (or something else – manufacturers are not restricted to these two rates), this can, but won't always, refer to the screen refresh rate; in other words, how many times the image is redrawn each second. For fast-moving action, sports for example, a higher refresh rate is preferable.

It could be useful to look at this figure if manufacturers always played fair, but they don't. You'll sometimes see a Hz figure in advertising or on packaging that is NOT the screen refresh rate, but something that the manufacturer has calculated, using a formula unique to themselves. If we can find the true refresh rate, we'll publish it.

At CHOICE, we're always more interested in a TV's performance than we are in its specifications.

COMPILED BY SIOBAHN DONOHOE

Tests

BBQs, eskies, juicers and smartphones – they're all here

40 BBQs
Smaller space? No problem. We've found the models that can take a good grilling

46 Eskies
Keep your cool and your drinks cooler all summer

48 Fitness trackers
Which of these bands are fit for purpose?

53 Juicers
The juicy details when it comes to nutrition claims

58 Enzyme cleaners
Cut down on elbow grease with these all-purpose cleaners

60 Stick vacs
Stick vacs have picked up in performance

63 Smartphones
Latest models rated to help you buy smart

66 Soundbars
Give your TV sound a little lift

70 Tyres
We've tested 18 tyres to keep you on track

74 LED light bulbs
The best of the bulbs revealed

We've put fitness trackers through their paces, on page 48

CHOICE's Matt Steen is with the band

CHOICE

CHOICE'S experienced technical staff puts products through their paces in our own testing laboratories. We use test methods based on Australian standards and develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

CHOICE Shopper
Members who have subscribed to CHOICE through our website have access to the best deals on products wherever this logo appears. Simply have your CHOICE membership number on hand, the model name and number, and the price you have been quoted. Phone 1300 360 655 and we'll source you the best deal.

CHOICE Online
For more related information and articles on this topic, go to **choice.com.au**

CHOICE Best Buy
Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report includes Best Buys.

CHOICE Green Buy
Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance. Not every test report includes Green Buys.

Balcony barbecuing

A backyard isn't the only place for a great Aussie BBQ. **Martha Psiroukis** investigates your options for high-density sausage sizzling

Nutshell

- Check with strata laws before investing in a gas BBQ for your balcony or courtyard.
- We test an electric BBQ that's a good choice for small confined spaces.

Barbecuing accidents can have greater implications in a block of flats than in an open backyard. Before buying a whizzbang new gas barbecue for your balcony, check the by-laws for your complex and/or the owners' corporation (previously called the body corporate) to see if there are any restrictions on using gas. The rules could be obscurely listed under 'storing of hazardous material', such as an LPG gas cylinder. If you're renting, you need to check for these restrictions in your lease. And if you are permitted to have a gas barbecue on your balcony, never keep more than one gas cylinder and never store them indoors.

For safety reasons, gas barbecues must always be used in very well ventilated spaces. That means barbecuing in an enclosed balcony is not advisable – even those with louvres, café blinds, or a significant amount of privacy screening could be very risky.

If this sounds like your place, consider an electric barbecue – although unfortunately, there aren't many on the market. We've included two electric options in our test, the Breville Smart Grill BGR820 and the Sunbeam Kettle King HG6600B. We can't recommend the Sunbeam, but the Breville is worth considering. See the profiles opposite for details.

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED MODELS

BEST TRADITIONAL MEDIUM/LARGE BBQS

90% Weber Genesis E330 (Dec 12/Jan 13)	$1899
87% Weber Spirit E320 LP (Dec 13/Jan 14)	$1099
82% Turbo TCQ4CWWJ (Dec 12/Jan 13)	$1899
81% Cordon Bleu Deluxe CD4CWWH (Dec 11/Jan 12)	$999

WHAT TO BUY

88% Weber Q3100

Good points

- Excellent in all cooking tests
- Good access to the cooking areas
- No smoke directed into your face

Bad points

- For best results hood must be closed when cooking
- Cleaning burners can be awkward
- Piezo ignition needs some pressure
- Hood can become dangerously hot
- Hotplate is only an optional extra – comes with two chargrill halves (included in price quoted)

85% Weber Q2200

Good points

- Excellent in all cooking tests
- Good access to the cooking area
- No smoke directed into your face
- Very good controls and ignition

Bad points

- For best results, hood must be closed when cooking
- Cleaning burners can be awkward
- Side tables can tilt under heavy items
- Hood can become dangerously hot
- Hotplate is only an optional extra – comes with two chargrill halves

81% Everdure E2GLPC14R E2GO

Good points

- Excellent result for sausages, steak, and marinated chicken wings
- Very good result for barbecue chicken
- Very easy to clean
- Very good controls
- Cooking area is a full chargrill plate in two halves; half hotplate included

Bad points

- No side panels to protect food and flame from draughts
- Hood stability only OK, and can become dangerously hot

WORTH CONSIDERING – Electric option

78% Breville Smart grill BGR840BSS

Good points

- Very good result for sausages, steak, and marinated chicken wings
- Very good controls and digital display
- Compact and portable
- Good result for toasted sandwiches
- Plates are easy to remove and clean
- Height-adjustable top plate
- One hour auto shut-off

Bad points

- Can't be used for roasting
- No side panels to protect from draughts
- Exterior surfaces can become hot

ABOUT THE REST

While not all barbecues can make our shortlist, many still perform reasonably well and may be worth considering.

MEDIUM/LARGE BBQs

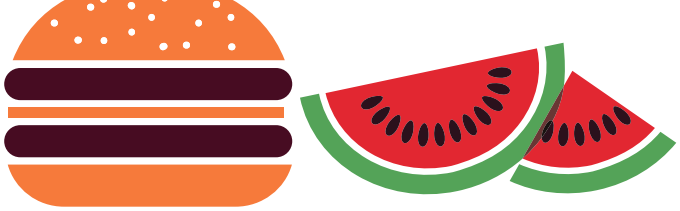
Ziegler & Brown Triple Grill ZG3GK is a good-performing barbecue that's easy to use. No smoke is directed into your face. Its three versatile cooking plates make for easy lifting and cleaning. On the downside, there are no side panels to protect food from draughts, the hood can become dangerously hot and it could be more stable when open. The evenness of heat isn't quite as good as some other models, but if you're an active cook and prefer to keep the hood open when cooking, then this is a good choice.

While the **Masport Elite Grande 210 552765** barbecue has plenty of features including a built-in timer, pizza stone and rotisserie (see the table on p44 for more details), both the Masport and **Matador Maverick** have areas that are difficult to access for cleaning, and the stainless steel exterior is also difficult to clean. They both have hoods that can become hot and blow smoke into the chef's face. Both barbecues have some sharp edges and require considerable effort to remove and replace the cylinder. Both require effort to assemble but the Masport was more difficult.

SMALL BBQ

The **Ziegler & Brown ZG1GRK**'s hood can become dangerously hot, with no side panels to protect food and flame from drafts, and its thermostat may not be accurate. It's difficult to manoeuvre when on its stand (there are no wheels or handles), and you only have the option of a full size hotplate or full size chargrill plate.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



ELECTRIC – NOT RECOMMENDED

The **Sunbeam Kettle King HG6600B** is not recommended because we consider it unsafe. Its stand is top-heavy and unstable, and can be easily knocked over – the barbecue is not secured to the stand. It's also difficult to use. A hook is used to rest the hood on the edge of the barbecue, but it's not stable and gets in the way when cooking. There are no side panels to shield food from draughts, and its hood can become dangerously hot. Food can easily slide off the non-stick hotplate when moving it around. You can't use metal utensils and the hotplate can be awkward to fit into a kitchen sink for cleaning. This unit cooks more like an electric frypan than a barbecue.

	COSTS		PERFORMANCE							FEATURES				
	Price ($)	Running cost ($, 5 years)	Overall score (%)	Cooking performance score (%)	Evenness score (%)	Evenness with high fat cooking score (%)	Low temperature score (%)	Roasting score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Warming rack	Reversible cooking plate	Side (wok) burner	Back burner for rotisserie	Viewing window
LARGE														
Weber Genesis E330	1899	1234	90	98	90	100	100	100	78	✓	✓	✓		
• **Weber** Q3100 (A)	759	741	88	98	90	100	100	100	73					
Weber Spirit E320	1099	1103	87	94	100	100	90	85	77	✓	✓	✓		
Turbo TCQ4CWWJ	1899	1810	82	86	70	90	100	85	76	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Cordon Bleu Deluxe CD4CWWH	999	2172	81	84	70	75	100	90	76	✓	✓			✓
Beefeater Discovery 1100E	1499	2140	78	84	90	70	90	85	68	✓	✓	✓		✓
• **Ziegler & Brown** Triple Grill ZG3GK (B)	858	856	77	80	75	75	90	80	73		✓			
Matador Retro 4-BNR 3170423	699	1264	76	76	70	75	75	85	75	✓	✓	✓		
Matador 4 Burner Grande BBQ	795	1991	75	75	70	70	75	85	76	✓	✓	✓		✓
Grilled M135-B-W (SKU 695929)	399	1188	74	76	70	75	85	75	70	✓	✓	✓		✓
Everdure Figura Esee	799	1810	71	76	60	55	90	100	64	✓		✓		✓
Jumbuck B145-13	299	833	70	74	65	70	85	75	63	✓	✓	✓		
Masport Lifestyle 4 Hooded 552757	549	1570	70	70	65	65	65	85	70	✓	✓	✓		
Discoverer G4DISK	799	1382	69	73	70	75	75	70	63	✓	✓	✓		
• **Matador** Maverick MBQ1003 (3180549)	599	1382	68	70	70	65	75	70	65	✓	✓	✓		
• **Masport** Elite Grande 210 552765	1199	1745	66	69	75	65	60	75	63	✓		✓		
Tucker S Class	2505	1498	66	71	65	70	65	85	58	✓				✓
SMALL / PORTABLE														
• **Weber** Q2200 (C)	663	362	85	93	90	90	100	90	74				na	
• **Everdure** E2GLPC14R E2GO (D)	478	428	81	89	90	90	95	80	70		✓		na	
Everdure E2GO (D) (E)	399	395	80	89	80	90	100	85	66		✓		na	
Ziegler & Brown Twin Grill ZGTGK (E)	668	629	73	73	70	65	80	75	74		✓		na	
Masport Raglan 552719	239	332	72	75	75	70	80	na	67		✓		na	
Beefeater BUGG on cart (F)	599	678	71	79	85	65	80	85	60		✓		na	
• **Ziegler & Brown** ZG1GRK (G)	439	494	69	71	75	70	70	70	65				na	
Billabong G2BBTJ	199	632	66	70	45	65	80	90	60	✓			na	
ELECTRIC														
• **Breville** Smart Grill BGR840BSS	350	14	78	83	85	85	80	na	70	na	na	na	na	
ELECTRIC - NOT RECOMMENDED														
• **Sunbeam** Kettle King HG6600B	299	23	64	70	60	75	75	70	54			na	na	

USING THE TABLE • Newly tested **Price** Recommended retail, as of November 2014. **Running costs** are based on using the barbecue three times a week for 30 minutes over five years (you should expect your calculations are on the BBQ's maximum setting, so actual costs will be less per year. A barbecue is generally cheaper to run on natural gas. The electric models are for the same usage but at 28 cents/kWh. **Overall score** up of ease of cooking (40%) and 20% each for mobility, using the controls and cleaning. **Dimensions** are measured with the hood closed and side trays open (if applicable) and include knobs, wheels and handles. **Gas** aluminium; **CB** ceramic blocks; **I** infrared burners; **CS** coated steel. **NS** non-stick **(A)** Tested with the Family Q tailor-made hotplate ($69.95). The tested model is similar to the Weber Q3200, which has electronic ignition, specialist Weber dealers. Tested with Weber Q Patio cart ($199), and the half hotplate ($64.95). Extras are included in the price listed. The Weber Q2100 is similar but with a lower lid, no thermometer, and piezo ignition. Extras are included in the price listed. **(F)** Available in amber or graphite coloured finish. **(G)** Available in red or grey coloured finish. Tested with the Z&G portable stand ($79.95) and hotplate ($59.95), included in the price

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Cooking area The usefulness of the cooking area depends on the cooking evenness, so use our cooking scores in the table to make sure you get the most out of this.

Hotplates, grills and burners Cast iron hotplates are more susceptible to rust. If you live in a coastal area, enamelled or high grade stainless steel hotplates are recommended.

Ignition types are usually piezo or electronic. Piezo generates a spark at the push of a button. Some piezo systems direct a jet of flame into the burners to light them more reliably.

			SPECIFICATIONS										
Side tray / folding	Storage cupboard	Natural gas option	Hotplate / grill material	Flame diffuser	Number of burners	Burner/s material	Ignition type	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	External temperatures after 60min (°C, controls / handle / hood / glass viewing panel)	Weight (kg)	Gas consumption (kg / h)	Total cooking area (m^{-2})	Contacts
✓/ -	✓	✓	VE	E	3 (K)	SS	Electronic	119 x 152 x 68	44 / 31 / 70	na	0.75	0.31	weberbbq.com.au
✓/ ✓		✓	PECI		2	SS	Piezo	110 x 146 x 57	31 / 36 / 103	na	0.45	0.24	weberbbq.com.au
✓/ -	✓	✓	PECI	E	3	SS	Electronic	115 x 128 x 66	29 / 38 / 105	na	0.67	0.23	weberbbq.com.au
✓/ -	✓	✓	VE	I	4	SS	Flamethrower	119 x 164 x 59	35 / 42 / 75	na	1.10	0.38	barbequesgalore.com.au
✓/ -	✓	✓	CI	CB	4	SS	Electronic	121 x 183 x 61	28 / 29 / 115 / 112	na	1.32	0.36	barbequesgalore.com.au
✓/ -	✓	✓	VE	SS	4	CI	Quartz start	116 x 156 x 59	44 / 54 / 93 / 92	na	1.30	0.38	beefeaterbbq.com
✓/ -		✓	CI / AL		3	SS	Flamethrower	111 x 134 x 71	26 / 31 / 93	na	0.52	0.24	zieglerandbrown.com.au
✓/ -	✓	✓	ECI	E	4	SS	Electronic	112 x 145 x 67	25 / 25 / 61	na	0.77	0.27	bunnings.com.au
✓/ -	✓		ECI	CB	4	ECI	Piezo	130 x 160 x 60	55 / 48 / 78 / 105	na	1.21	0.59	matadorbbqs.com.au
✓/ -	✓	✓	ECI	E	3	SS	Piezo	127 x 141 x 60	24 / 36 / 72	na	0.72	0.27	mitre10.com.au
✓/ -	✓	✓	CI	SS	4	VE	Rotary piezo	124 x 154 x 59	33 / 45 / 100	na	1.1	0.34	everdure.com
✓/ -	✓	✓	CI	SS	3	SS	Piezo	109 x 122 x 61	25 / 31 / 107	na	0.51	0.19	bunnings.com.au
✓/ -	✓	✓	CI	SS	4	SS	Piezo	117 x 146 x 59	25 / 33 / 46	na	0.95	0.29	masport.com.au
✓/ -	✓		VE	E	4	SS	Electronic	116 x 135 x 54	30 / 30 / 88	na	0.84	0.26	barbequesgalore.com.au
✓/ -	✓	✓	ECI	VE	4	SS	Rotary piezo	119 x 140 x 56	29 / 29 / 70	na	0.84	0.28	matador.com.au
✓/ -	✓	✓	PECI	CI	4	SS	Rotary piezo	123 x 160 x 62	30 / 30 / 50	na	1.06	0.38	masport.com.au
✓/ ✓		✓	SS / SS	CB	4	SS	Piezo	126 x 161 x 61	35 / 35 / 100 / 100	na	0.91	0.37	bbqfactory.com.au
✓/ ✓		✓	PECI		1	SS	Electronic	104 x 130 x 53	27 / 37 / 103	19	0.22	0.18	weberbbq.com.au
✓/ (H)		✓	VE		1	SS	Piezo	107 x 117 x 50	27 / 41 / 103	17	0.26	0.20	everdure.com.au
✓/		✓	TC		2	SS	Electronic	38 x 95 x 50	40 / 47 / 122	14	0.24	0.18	everdure.com
✓/ (J)		✓	ECI		2	SS	Piezo	47 x 118 x 56	26 / 42 / 95	17	0.38	0.18	barbequesgalore.com.au
- / -		✓	CI	AL	1	SS	Manual	27 x 57 x 40	26 / 45 / 102	10	0.20	0.10	masport.com.au
✓/ (J)		✓	PECI		2	SS	Piezo	105 x 109 x 71	43 / 45 / 80	17	0.41	0.17	beefeaterbbq.com
		✓	CI / AL		1	SS	Flamethrower	106 x 68 x 54	30 / 28 / 107	18	0.30	0.17	zieglerandbrown.com.au
✓/ ✓			CI	CS	2	AL	Electronic	114 x 114 x 53	45 / 50 / 118	na	0.38	0.20	bunnings.com.au
na	na	na	NS	na	na	na	Switch	18 x 42 x 39	24 /24 / 54	9	na	0.14	breville.com.au
tray below		na	NS	na	na	na	Switch	107 x 66 x 54	35 / 39 / 78	13	na	0.16	sunbeam.com.au

barbecue to last at least that long), at an average cost of $4.22/kg of LPG gas. The cost of gas is an average of what we paid for 9kg gas bottle refills during our test. For comparative purposes, our gas consumption is cooking performance (60%) and ease of use (40%). **Cooking performance** is calculated by averaging the scores for grilling steak, sausages and marinated chicken wings and roasting a chook. **Ease of use** is made **consumption** is measured with all burners on high. **TABLE NOTES na** Not applicable **E** Enamel; **SS** stainless steel; **CI** cast iron; **ECI** enamel cast iron; **VE** vitreous enamel; **PECI** porcelain enamelled cast iron; **AL** a higher lid, and a hood thermometer. Extras are included in the price listed. **(B)** Tested with the Z&G triple mobile cart ($199), and centre hotplate option ($59.95). Extras are included in the price listed. **(C)** Available at **(D)** Tested with trolley stand ($129) and optional half hotplate option ($59.95), included in listed price. **(E)** Available in red or grey. Tested with the Z&G twin mobile cart ($179), the Z&G twin reversible hotplate ($59.95). listed. **(H)** Storage compartment in each side table. **(J)** Side trays can be removed and stored in the barbecue. **(K)** Also has sear burner.

Cooling off for the weekend

A poor-performing cooler can have the wrong kind of chilling effect, says Matthew Steen

CHOICE tests many products designed to keep things cool, but none quite like the humble cooler, or esky. Banged about on trips, in and out of cars and boats, many of you are interested not only in whether it keeps your food safe but just how easy the esky is to move around and if it'll last the distance.

We've found the models we recommend tend to be heavy, thick-walled and sturdy. The ones near the bottom of the table tend to be thin-walled, plasticky and lighter – and less insulated.

This may not be a surprise for many of you who are used to longer camping or fishing trips, but if you're new to the cooler game, think about just how long you need to keep the ice. The longer you're away from civilisation, the better you'll need your cooler to be, and this generally means a heavier model. You won't want to be carrying it by hand over a long distance; these bigger coolers are best for transporting in a car or boat. And if your esky is full, get someone to help you lift it.

Of course, this will matter less if you're close to a source of ice; then you can just drain the excess water and regularly refill the ice in the cooler. But for those times you're a good distance from the nearest ice refill, hedge your bets and go for a cooler that's a better performer.

Nutshell

- We find a wide range of differences in test results.
- All 13 eskies range in capacity from 55L to 85L.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Size Check the cooler fits the space you'll be transporting it in. Smaller coolers are easier to lift without assistance. Taller coolers offer vertical bottle storage. Models with recessed lids provide some extra loading space, but items stored in this area could get very warm.

Insulation Thicker walls generally provide better insulation. Look for walls that are consistently thick, not just at the top. Also look for walls and lids that don't compress easily when pressed, as these are more likely to be filled with air rather than insulation material. You're also more likely to be able to use the better-insulated hard coolers as a seat, as they're sturdier.

Wheels make pulling a heavy loaded cooler on smooth surfaces much easier than carrying it.

Handles should be easy to grasp and robust. Shoulder straps are useful for smaller coolers. Pull handles for larger wheelie types are handy, but try them out to make sure they suit your height.

WHAT TO BUY

90%
Dune 4WD 85L Wheeled Buggy Ice Box 90034886

Good points

- Excellent performance score
- Excellent for draining
- Very easy to load
- Excellent for ice keeping
- Has wheels

Bad points

- Comparatively heavy
- Handles are not very comfortable
- Cannot fit tall bottles upright

	Price ($)
Dune 4WD 85L Wheeled Buggy Ice Box 90034886	400
Techniice Signature Series 70L Long	259
Tropical Ice Box T62 62L	263
Evakool E060 60L Ice Box	359
Waeco Cool-Ice WCI-70	289
Coleman 58L Xtreme wheeled cooler	180
Esky 65L Hard Ice King Cooler with wheels	159
Chillco 60L Dark Blue Cooler DB60L	130
Ice Kool IK070 70L Ice Box	289
IceMate IM70W Wheelie Icebox	359
Icey-Tek 70L Long Box	195
Caribee 80L Jumbo Cooler with wheels	169
Willow 55L Wheelie 2146	83

We've recommended coolers with at least an 80% overall score. For profiles of all models tested, go online to **choice.com.au/coolers**.

89%
Techniice Signature Series 70L Long

Good points
- Excellent performance score
- Excellent for ice keeping
- Excellent for loading
- Small basket to help organisation
- Very good drainage

Bad points
- Cannot fit tall bottles upright

81%
Tropical Ice Box T62 62L

Good points
- Very good performance score
- Very good for ice keeping
- Can fit tall bottles upright

Bad points
- Small sump and slow drain
- Small handles may be uncomfortable for some

HOW WE TEST

Performance Our tester, Corinna Horrigan, loads each esky (preconditioned to 32°C) with bottles equivalent to 20% of its capacity and ice to 20% of its volume, shuts them and places them in a temperature-controlled room (32°C). She measures the time it takes for the average temperature inside the bottles to rise from 0°C to 2°C, then from 2°C to 8°C. The slower the warm-up, the better the score. We open the coolers for a few seconds during the test to tamp down the ice; they'll warm up more quickly with regular opening.

Ease of use Corinna assesses how easy each one is to carry, load and unload, and drain, and the ease of opening and closing the lid.

PERFORMANCE				FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS				
Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Time for temperature to rise from 0°C to 8°C (h:m)	Wheels	Drain	Fits 33cm bottle upright	Baskets	Claimed volume (L)	Weight – empty (kg)	Dimensions (cm, LxHxD)	Warranty (years)	Contact
90	95	78	118:36	✓	✓			85	13.8	83 x 44 x 49	5	anaconda.com.au
89	94	78	118:30		✓		1	70	14.35	88 x 46 x 46	1	techniice.com
81	88	63	107:36		✓	✓		62	11.9	70 x 47 x 49	3	tropicaliceboxes.com
78	79	75	93:24		✓			60	10.7	71 x 43 x 44	5	evakool.com
77	75	80	85:18		✓			68	10.85	69 x 43 x 48	5	waeco.com/australia
76	77	74	87:54	✓	✓	✓		58	6.5	79 x 45 x 38	1	colemanaustralia.com.au
76	77	72	88:12	✓	✓	✓		65	8.9	77 x 45 x 41	ns	colemanaustralia.com.au
74	72	78	79:54		✓	✓		60	9.15	57 x 45 x 49	Lifetime	chillco.com.au
71	72	67	80:12		✓	✓		70	7.35	49 x 47 x 45	5	evakool.com
70	67	76	73:06	✓	✓		2	70	14.6	90 x 43 x 46	5	evakool.com
69	71	63	79:12		✓			70	12.4	85 x 44 x 43	3~5	icey-tek.com.au
62	62	63	63:42	✓	✓	✓		80	7.15	70 x 46 x 44	1	caribee.com.au
46	45	49	36:18	✓	✓	✓		55	5.5	56 x 43 x 40	10	willow.com.au

ABOUT THE REST

The performance of the IceMate, Caribee and Willow models was borderline to OK; their temperature rose to 8°C in less than 75 hours. The Icey-Tek's rope handles are quite long and it bumps against you while carrying it. The Esky's handles are positioned too close to the lid, making it uncomfortable to carry. The Caribee, Evakool, Ice Kool, Icey-Tek, Tropical and Willow products all have drainage issues: very small sumps, being very slow to drain, or not draining completely. The others had good performance and ease of use, but didn't make the cut-off. ■

USING THE TABLE Scores Overall score is made up of performance (70%) and ease of use (30%). **Price** Recommended retail, as of November 2014.

Stepping up

Matthew Steen puts nine of the most popular fitness trackers through their paces

You may have seen these recently popping up in sales, or maybe a friend has been sporting a funny-looking band on their wrist. Perhaps you've been recommended one to help you track fitness goals, or your health insurance company has been giving them away as an incentive. Wherever you've heard of fitness trackers, they are certainly muscling in on the fitness tools market.

With a wealth of claimed features, fitness trackers are also edging their way into other traditional areas such as heart rate monitors and fitness watches. Competing with this space is your smartphone which, in every product tested but the Kogan, partners with the fitness tracker to display data in a user-friendly way. The fitness tracker sends the data via Bluetooth to either an app made by the fitness tracker manufacturer or a third party application. However, the Kogan Fortis needs to be synchronised with a computer.

Whether or not you'll find these fitness trackers helpful depends on your discipline and whether you're good with consistent goal-setting. Check out our earlier article (*CHOICE,* Mar 14) for more information on fitness bands as a fitness tool and other options on offer.

Nutshell

- Nine fitness trackers tested, two recommended.
- A wealth of features are offered, but focus on the essentials.

Socially sporting

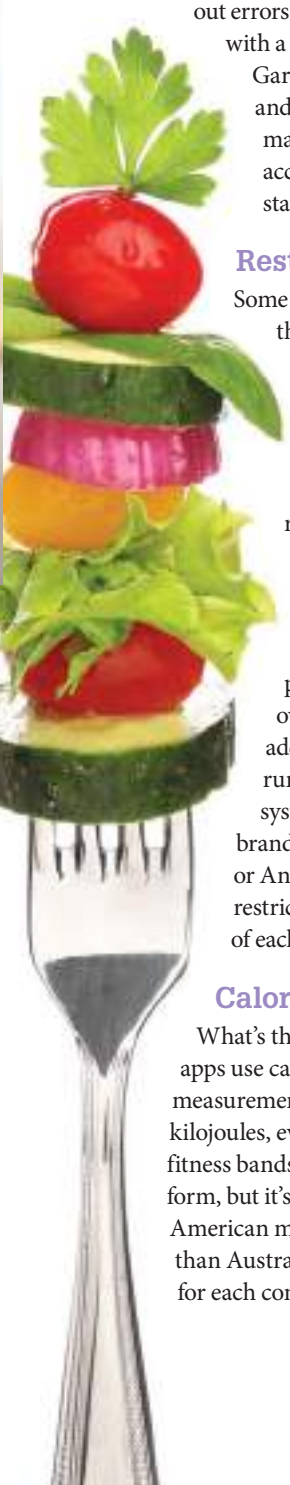
More than half of the fitness trackers tested offer result-sharing functions for social networks like Facebook and Twitter. Depending on your circle of friends, you may lose a few connections if you bombard them with milestones achieved while wearing your fitness tracker, or you could be surprised by the community support that rallies behind you. Some brands, such as Fitbit, have their own online community that you can connect with –

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

you can even locate fellow users by country or email, depending on how much privacy you want to sacrifice.

It's all about the swing

Whether they use an accelerometer or a simple rocker, all but one of these fitness trackers needs a swinging arm to measure the pace of your step. We tested this by keeping the arm static while walking, and many threw out errors compared to our test with a swinging arm. The Garmin, Fitbit, Fortis and Sony products still maintained excellent accuracy despite the static arm.



Restricting the flow

Some fitness trackers, such as the Nike+ FuelBand, only work with iOS in Australia, and the Sony SmartBand only works with Android. The Samsung Gear Fit requires an app that can only be downloaded from the Samsung App store, which means you also need a Samsung phone to use it. (It seems overly restrictive to put an additional barrier for users running the right operating system, or OS, on a different brand of phone.) Whether iOS or Android, they also have restrictions on which versions of each OS they'll work with.

Calories vs kilojoules

What's the deal? All of these fitness apps use calories as a unit of energy measurement rather than the metric kilojoules, even after setting the fitness bands to metric. This is poor form, but it's probably because the American market is so much larger than Australia's that it's not worth it for each company to add this into their design. Luckily, some of the third-party apps such as MyFitnessPal (myfitnesspal.com), which some fitness bands can link to, can convert easily. Otherwise, you'll be stuck with mentally converting one calorie to 4.2 kilojoules when you go into your local grocery store and start comparing nutrition labels.

WHAT TO BUY

We recommend fitness trackers that receive an overall score of 80% or more.

88%

Samsung Gear Fit

Good points

- Very easy to set up
- High-resolution colour screen on band is very easy to use
- Excellent app for Samsung smartphones to monitor activity
- Lightweight band is easy to put on and take off
- Excellent accuracy for pace count and distance with arm swinging free
- Suitable for swimming (but not in salt or rough water, like the surf)
- Has heart rate monitor
- Has a food tracker
- Can control media playback
- Can receive phone notifications

Bad points

- App only available for Samsung phones
- No web page for viewing activity
- Screen on band a bit hard to read in daylight
- Poor accuracy for pace count and distance with arm relatively immobile
- No alarms

80%

Garmin Vivofit

Good points

- Excellent iPhone app to monitor activity
- Very good Android app to monitor activity
- Lightweight band is easy to put on and take off
- Excellent accuracy for pace count and distance
- Suitable for swimming
- Social media sharing from app

Bad points

- Screen on band a bit hard to read in daylight
- No alarms

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Some fitness trackers come with a plethora of functions, a few of which you may never use. We found a lot of features that are tacked on, but the essentials are the same across most.

The **step counter** will measure your steps, although accuracy will vary depending on what you enter as your height, weight and in some cases pace length, and the technology used in the development of the device.

A **distance counter** can be adapted for metric or imperial systems, and generally measures distance based on your steps. Some newer fitness bands can use GPS technology to more accurately measure distance. None of those we tested have this feature.

The **calorie counter** will usually show how steps convert into calories lost. It generally measures in calories rather than kilojoules, which can make it difficult if you're doing some on-the-fly shopping, but there are some third-party apps such as MyFitnessPal that you can use for this through your smartphone.

Waterproof claims vary between models. Any that do claim this feature usually have the specifications on their website, but range from splash-proof to swimming to 50m depth.

OS versatility Some trackers can only work with Apple products, as with the Nike+, or only work on certain versions of Android – so check carefully that your phone matches the model's requirements. The Samsung only works in Australia with Samsung smartphones.

A **sleep tracker** claims to be able to measure when you're active in your sleep. Most of them require you to both wear the band and activate this feature before going to sleep, so you'll need a little discipline if you want this information.

An **alarm** can be useful, especially if it's a silent alarm that just buzzes on your wrist to wake you up without waking anyone else. They can also be helpful for runs and other situations.

The **altimeter** feature will suit users who want to measure stairs or height changes. It can easily measure the degree of effort made when running or walking, for example, rather than just the distance.

Milestones act as rewards and as incentives to keep on going – such as when you get a notification that you've passed 10,000 steps, for example. They can also be automatically sent to your social network sites.

		PERFORMANCE			FEATURES														
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Accuracy score (%)	Calorie counter	Step counter	Distance counter	Water resistance/proof claims	Android app	iOS app	Windows phone app	Web page tracker	Sleep tracker	Alarm	Altimeter	Milestones	Heart rate monitor	Session tracker	Food tracker
Samsung Gear Fit	249	88	83	98	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Garmin Vivofit	130	80	72	98	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	
LG Lifeband Touch	199	77	68	98	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	
Sony SmartBand	99	77	67	99	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓					
Jawbone UP24	180	76	67	98	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓					✓
Nike+ FuelBand SE	249	76	77	75	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	
Polar Loop	159	73	64	94	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓						✓	
Fitbit Flex	130	67	53	99	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Fortis TrackFit	69	64	49	98	✓	✓	✓						✓			✓			

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended or average retail, as of November 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of ease of use (70%) and accuracy (30%).

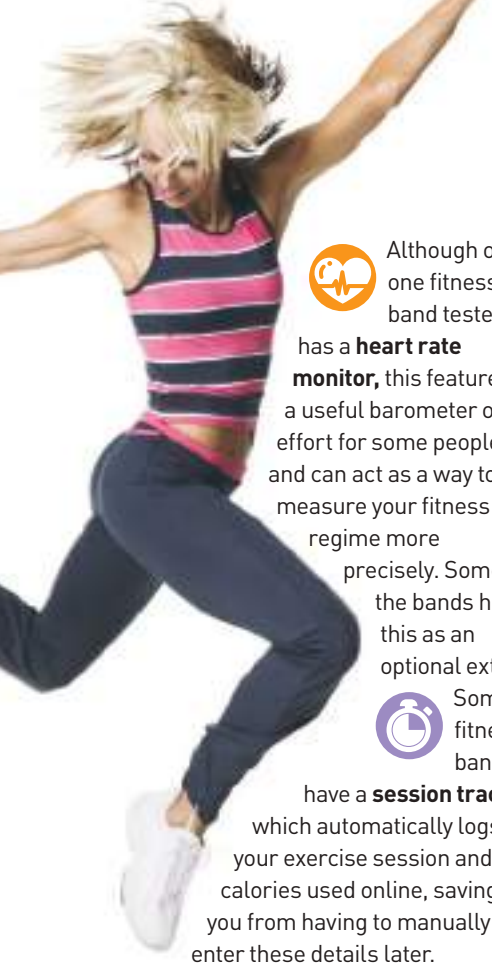


IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Although only one fitness band tested has a **heart rate monitor,** this feature is a useful barometer of effort for some people and can act as a way to measure your fitness regime more precisely. Some of the bands have this as an optional extra.

Some fitness bands have a **session tracker** which automatically logs your exercise session and calories used online, saving you from having to manually enter these details later.

A **food tracker** built into the smartphone app means you can log your intake of food throughout the day. If you have the discipline to maintain this routine, you might find it useful to track the number of calories you're taking in versus using up. The bands' native food trackers tend to be US-centric, however, so it would be worth looking around at third-party apps such as MyFitnessPal.

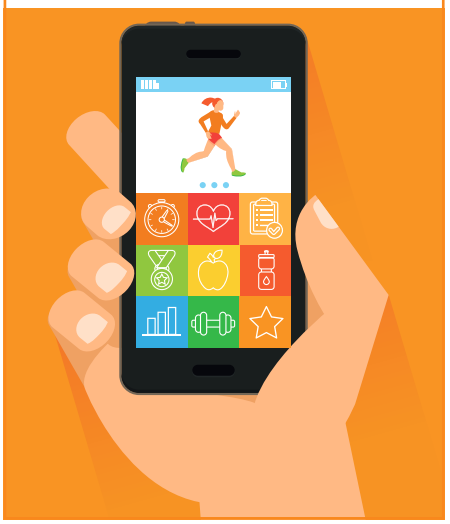
Social media sharing is an important feature for some people. Letting friends know you've passed a milestone or creating a competitive element can act as an incentive. No fitness band covers all social media outlets, however, and the Kogan, LG, Samsung and Sony devices offer none.

Battery life can be an important specification and most claim a few days at least, with the Garmin device offering the highest at more than one year. The Garmin uses batteries, and all the others recharge via USB.

Bluetooth capacity is also important. If your smartphone doesn't have at least the base Bluetooth version required, then you may be missing out on some features.

About the rest

The **Fitbit**, **Jawbone** and **Sony** are quite limited in what data they display on their screen. All but the **Nike+** device have excellent accuracy with a swinging arm. The **Kogan** device has limited communication options, having to be connected to a PC to synchronise its data. The **Polar**, **Fitbit**, **Garmin** and **Fortis** are all more difficult to attach around the wrist than other products tested.



		SPECIFICATIONS		CONTACT
Social media share	Bluetooth	Weight (g)	Claimed battery life (days)	
	✓	27	3-4	samsung.com.au
✓	✓	24	≥ 1yr	garmin.com.au
	✓	51	2	lg.com.au
	✓	26	5	sony.com.au
✓	✓	24	≤ 14	jawbone.com
✓	✓	33	≤ 4	nike.com
✓	✓	36	≤ 6	flow.polar.com/loop
✓	✓	16	3-5	fitbit.com
		29	5-7	kogan.com.au

HOW WE TEST

Ease of use We set up each fitness tracker on Android, iOS and Windows where available and score how easy it is to set up and wear, and to track on-the-go information via the band and its interfaces.

Performance We set up each device and measure paces and distance with a calibrated tracking tool, and then measure this against what the fitness tracker displays.

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IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

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The juicy details

Which juicer type is better for you: fast or slow? **Martha Psiroukis** finds out

Nutshell

- We put the squeeze on 15 popular juicers to see how fast and slow types compare.
- Nutrition claims: do slow juicers really extract more nutrients than fast juicers?

Perplexed by all the claims made about juicers, like "preserves more nutrients, minerals and enzymes, yielding the best possible flavour"? We've squeezed our way through 15 kilograms each of oranges, apples, and carrots, and mounds of green stuff, to assess the yield performance (how much juice is made) and ease of use of 15 popular juicers and the NutriBullet. We also analysed the juice for key nutrients – calcium, iron, magnesium and vitamin C in orange, carrot and green juice.

Fast or slow?

What's the difference? **Centrifugal** or **fast juicers** are the most common and affordable type of juicer. They spin at high speeds to pulverise the fruit or vegetables, and use centrifugal force to separate the pulp from the juice (hence their name). They're noisy and fast, are more likely to have large chutes, and can be bulky.

Slow juicers (often called cold press juicers) slowly crush the fruit/vegetable and direct the juice and pulp out of two different chutes. They're quieter, take longer to juice and tend to have smaller parts and chutes. Some can also be used to make nut butters and milks, ice-cream and more (see Not just a juicer, p56).

Which one lasts longer?

To find out, we compared the taste, texture and appearance of apple juice 48 hours after juicing.

After five minutes, all the juices had separated into a frothy top, a cloudy or transparent green/brown liquid, with sediment on the bottom. After 24 hours all the juices had turned brown, with further separation. By 48 hours in, the juice had very distinct layers – some had a transparent pale amber liquid in between the frothy top and sediment on the bottom, while others stayed cloudy (see the table on p57 for details).

We found that apart from slight variation in the amount of froth or sediment, and cloudy or clear liquid, all the apple juices still had a pleasant taste at 48 hours. It's just a matter of whether you'd prefer to drink a transparent or cloudy-looking juice. That said, many of the manufacturers – including those of slow juicers – recommend that the juice be drunk immediately after juicing to maximise the amount and quality of nutrients consumed.

What to buy

The models recommended in our What to buy list are good all-round performers, but some others in the table might be a better match for some people who want something particular in a juicer. See the tables on p55 and 56, and About the rest on p57.

Delicious and nutritious?

There's no single juicer or juicer type that consistently extracts the maximum amount of nutrients from each juice tested. For example, the **Kuvings** slow juicer extracts a relatively high amount of vitamin C from orange juice, but also one of the lowest quantities of calcium out of green juice. Similarly, the **Sunbeam Cold Press JE9000's** results are relatively high for vitamin C from orange, but low in magnesium from green juice.

But while there are big differences in the amount of some of the minerals or ▸

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

vitamins extracted by each juicer, they're relatively insignificant in the bigger picture. According to the National Health and Medical Research Council, the recommended daily intake (RDI) of calcium for most adults is 1000mg. The amount you'd get out of a glass of our green juice produced by the best performer for extracting this nutrient is 60mg – which is just six per cent of your daily requirement and only 15mg more than average.

On the other hand, the RDI of vitamin C for an adult is about 45mg, and the orange juice from most of these juicers provides about three times the RDI in a single glass. The catch is that vitamin C deterioriates very quickly, so drinking the juice immediately is the only way you'll get anywhere near this amount.

What about the temperature?

Some slow-juicer manufacturers claim that centrifugal juicers heat up the juice and don't retain as many nutrients or vitamins as a slow juicer. We measured the temperature of the fruit and vegetables before juicing and after juicing, and there was no significant difference in temperature (with the exception of the juice from the NutriBullet). Rises in temperature in fast and slow juicers, if any, were mostly within 1°C. The NutriBullet saw a rise in temperature from 3°C to 5°C, depending on the processing time.

WHAT TO BUY

75%
Breville The Juice Fountain Max BJE410
Type: Fast

Good points
- Very good orange juice yield
- Cord storage
- Good apple and green juice yield
- Easy to assemble and disassemble
- Large juice jug with froth separator and lid
- Very fast at juicing
- Relatively lightweight

Bad points
- Carrot juice yield is only OK
- Bulky unit can be difficult to clean in a kitchen sink
- Blade assembly can be touched through the chute
- One of the noisiest models

74%
Sunbeam JE5600 Double Sieve Juicer
Type: Fast

Good points
- Good green juice yield
- Very good orange and apple juice yield
- Relatively lightweight
- Easy to assemble and disassemble
- Large juice jug with froth separator and pulp container
- Cord storage
- Relatively cheap to buy

Bad points
- Only OK for carrot juice yield
- Large bulky unit can be difficult to clean in a kitchen sink
- Juice can drip from spout after processing
- Blade assembly can be reached through the chute
- The noisiest model in this test

73%
Breville The Juice Fountain Compact BJE200
Type: Fast

Good points
- Good apple, orange and green juice yield
- Easy to assemble and disassemble
- Relatively lightweight
- Medium juice jug with froth separator and lid
- Cord storage
- Relatively cheap to buy

Bad points
- Only OK for carrot juice yield
- Integrated pulp container
- Large bulky unit can be difficult to clean in a kitchen sink
- Unit jolts initially when switched on
- Blade assembly can be reached through the chute by smaller hands
- One of the noisiest models

NUTRITIONAL YIELD	CARROT				ORANGE				GREEN			
	Vitamin C (mg/250mL)	Calcium (mg/250mL)	Iron (mg/250mL)	Magnesium (mg/250mL)	Vitamin C (mg/250mL)	Calcium (mg/250mL)	Iron (mg/250mL)	Magnesium (mg/250mL)	Vitamin C (mg/250mL)	Calcium (mg/250mL)	Iron (mg/250mL)	Magnesium (mg/250mL)
BioChef Atlas	22	39	na	16	151	41	na	28	81	49	2	49
Breville the Juice Fountain Compact BJE200	21	13	na	10	153	30	na	26	76	47	2	57
Breville the Juice Fountain Crush BJS600	22	34	na	13	149	38	na	24	79	56	2	53
Breville the Juice Fountain Max BJE410	21	11	na	10	141	26	na	25	65	40	2	63
Healthstart Ceramic	23	36	na	15	155	42	na	28	68	34	2	63
Hippocrates Plus 1305	23	41	na	16	143	39	na	26	68	51	1	76
Hurom HG Elite	21	38	na	16	157	47	na	28	61	61	2	56
Kuvings B6000 - 621CBS2	20	37	na	15	141	37	na	25	87	33	1	58
NutriBullet	3	35	na	9	115	72	2	28	38	49	2	52
Omega VRT352	21	38	na	15	153	45	na	26	75	48	2	58
Oscar Neo - DA 1000	25	35	na	15	158	35	na	26	80	51	2	66
Philips HR1873/72	22	15	na	12	155	32	na	26	56	32	2	43
Russell Hobbs RHJU85AU	19	34	na	15	151	41	na	25	57	50	2	48
Sunbeam JE4800 Juice Drop	22	14	na	11	122	33	1	26	62	39	3	42
Sunbeam JE5600 Double Sieve Juicer	20	14	1	11	138	33	na	24	62	29	2	46
Sunbeam JE9000 Cold Press Juicer	22	36	na	15	160	38	na	26	75	56	2	46

na Not applicable.

73%
Kuvings B6000 621CBS2
Type: Slow

Good points
- Very good orange and apple juice yield
- Cap on juice spout can be used to stop juice dripping after processing
- Relatively quiet (but one of the noisiest slow juicers)
- One of the fastest slow juicers
- Small footprint – good for limited bench space (but it's tall)

Bad points
- Only OK for green juice yield
- Borderline for carrot juice yield
- Pulp can become jammed around filter, stopping the processing
- Assembly/disassembly can be fiddly
- Blade assembly can be reached through the chute
- One of the heaviest units
- Very expensive to buy

72%
Philips HR1873/72
Type: Fast

Good points
- Very good apple juice yield
- Good orange and green juice yield
- Large juice jug with froth separator and pulp container
- Cord storage
- Easy to assemble and disassemble
- Relatively lightweight

Bad points
- Only OK for carrot juice yield
- Large bulky unit
- When the integrated pulp container has reached maximum capacity, the pulp will end up in the juice collector, and so the appliance can become blocked
- Blade assembly accessible
- Noisy

72%
Sunbeam JE4800 Juice Drop
Type: Fast

Best Buy

Good points
- Good apple juice yield
- Easy-clean unit and parts
- Very easy to assemble/disassemble
- Light weight
- Small unit not bulky, easy to clean and store
- Cord storage
- Cheap to buy

Bad points
- Only OK for orange and green juice yield
- Borderline for carrot juice yield
- Processing hard fruits and veggies can cause the unit to jolt, vibrate and jam
- No juice jug supplied
- Juice can drip from spout after processing
- Motor unit is white and can stain easily

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Not just a juicer

Some juicers claim they can also be used for preparing other foods. The **BioChef** claims to make sorbet, baby foods, nut milks, smoothies and ice-cream. The **Healthstart** says it can prepare nut butters, pasta and noodles, frozen desserts, soy milk, dressings, dips, breads and cookies, juice wheatgrass, mince meat – even fill sausages! The **Hippocrates** claims to crush grains, make ice-cream and mince meat. The **Oscar** is claimed to mince meat and fish, slice vegetables, and crush ice. The **Omega** can make soy milk, and the **Russell Hobbs** should be suitable for grains and nuts.

How we test

We've changed our test method in response to how members tell us they use their juicers. That means results and scores here can't be compared to past tests.

Performance Fiona Mair, home economist from CHOICE's test kitchen, processes a kilogram each of carrots, apples, oranges and a combination of English spinach, kiwi, pear, cucumber, celery and mint to make green juice. She evaluates each juicer's ability to juice foods of varying degrees of hardness and texture, and measures their yield and juicing time.

Ease of use Fiona checks how easy is it is to 'feed' the juicer, noting the size of the chute and how small the pieces must be cut to fit. She checks the amount of feed pressure needed, if there's any splashing or leaking while juicing, and if juice drips out of the spout after processing. She also assesses the ease of assembling and disassembling and cleaning the parts, as well as the exterior of the unit.

Nutritional yield We sent samples of carrot, orange and green juice to a lab to be analysed for calcium, iron and magnesuim. Because vitamin C begins to oxidise as soon as it's extracted, we measured vitamin C immediately after juicing in the CHOICE labs.

			PERFORMANCE								
	Type	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Yield score (%)	Carrot juice yield (g)	Apple juice yield (g)	Orange juice yield (g)	Green juice yield (g)	Average juicing time (min:s)	Noise level (dBA)
Breville The Juice Fountain Max BJE410	Fast	250	75	76	72	503	630	704	684	0:38	76
Sunbeam JE5600 Double Sieve Juicer	Fast	159	74	73	77	606	704	703	671	0:56	80
Breville The Juice Fountain Compact BJE200	Fast	150	73	73	72	580	660	642	648	0:39	78
Kuvings B6000 621CBS2	Slow	629	73	73	72	442	740	695	615	2:12	61
Philips HR1873/72	Fast	250	72	71	74	543	694	676	670	0:42	75
Sunbeam JE4800 Juice Drop	Fast	80	72	74	66	468	628	599	615	1:14	65
Russell Hobbs RHJU85AU	Fast	180	69	68	72	580	606	713	615	3:19	62
Sunbeam JE9000 Cold Press Juicer	Slow	319	69	70	66	481	730	618	477	2:10	59
Breville The Juice Fountain Crush BJS600	Slow	400	67	63	77	515	796	711	656	2:21	60
Oscar Neo DA1000	Slow	529	67	63	76	482	811	703	655	4:15	56
Hurom HG Elite	Slow	599	66	60	80	508	840	735	719	2:59	51
Omega VRT352	Slow	579	66	63	74	483	712	713	669	2:25	56
BioChef Atlas	Slow	529	65	60	76	481	760	713	682	2:13	61
Healthstart Ceramic	Slow	299	64	60	74	576	782	683	547	3:34	51
Hippocrates Plus 1305	Slow	699	62	58	70	475	780	674	513	5:22	53

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of October 2014. **Overall score** Made up of ease of use (70%) and juicing yield (30%). We think that if a juicer is too difficult and fiddly to use, it's more likely that it disassembly (25%), and ease of cleaning (25%). **Yield score** Average amount of juice made per kilogram of product expressed as a percentage of the maximum moisture content in the food being juiced. **Average juicing Noise** is measured 90cm up and 50cm away from the bench, on the fastest setting. The sound level will vary depending on type of fruit or vegetable being juiced. **Quality of juice** This tells you the type of juice each juicer **Quality of juice after 48h** All juices had a pleasant taste after 48 hours, and all had sediment at the bottom of the jar. The only differences were that some had more or less froth on top, and the colour and clarity of the **Dimensions** This is the measured height, width and depth of each unit, with the juice spout positioned in front but the juice jug not in place (the way that it will sit on the bench, ready for use). **(A)** Juice jug, lid and filter are

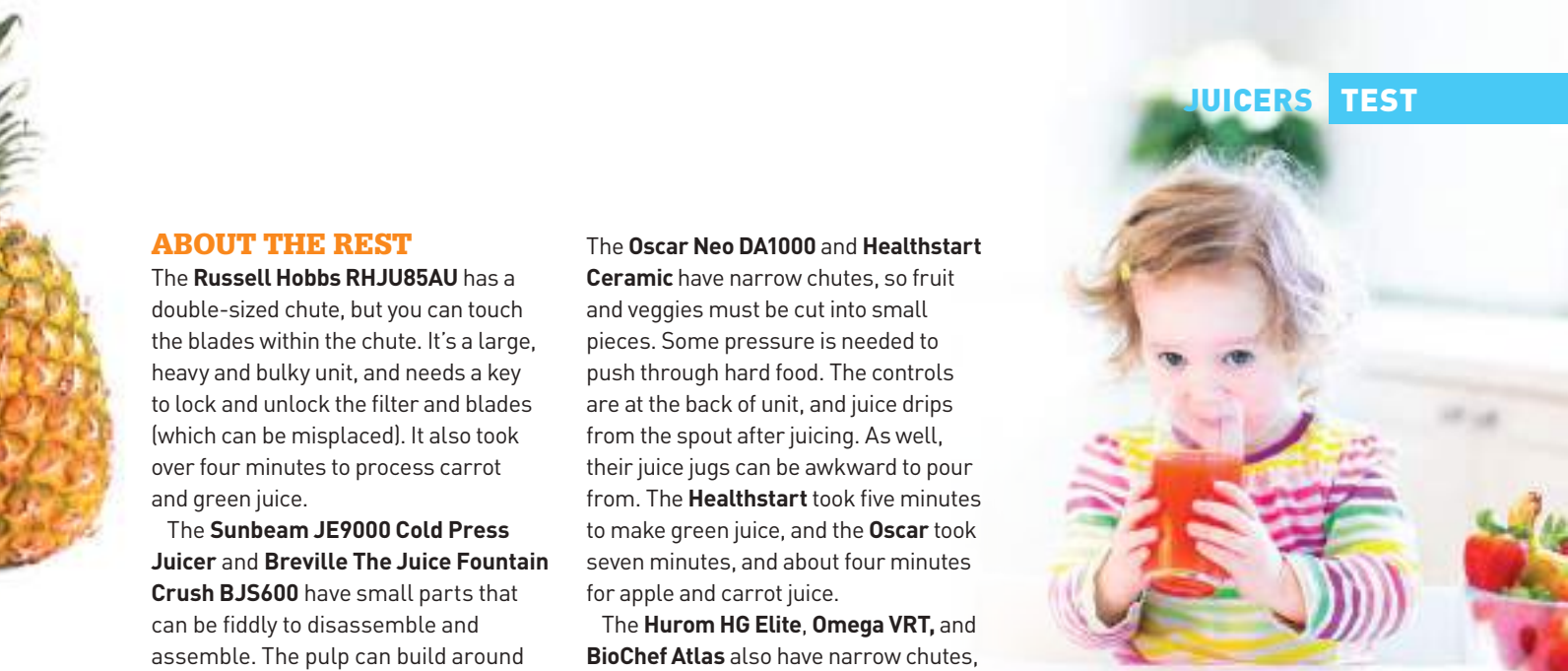


IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

ABOUT THE REST

The **Russell Hobbs RHJU85AU** has a double-sized chute, but you can touch the blades within the chute. It's a large, heavy and bulky unit, and needs a key to lock and unlock the filter and blades (which can be misplaced). It also took over four minutes to process carrot and green juice.

The **Sunbeam JE9000 Cold Press Juicer** and **Breville The Juice Fountain Crush BJS600** have small parts that can be fiddly to disassemble and assemble. The pulp can build around the filter and auger, stopping the processing, and both are heavy. The Sunbeam has a separate filter that sits over the juice jug for a smoother juice, but it clogs quickly – not an issue if you prefer pulpy juice. It also has a very good chute size but the blade assembly can be reached. Juice drips from the Breville's spout after juicing.

The **Oscar Neo DA1000** and **Healthstart Ceramic** have narrow chutes, so fruit and veggies must be cut into small pieces. Some pressure is needed to push through hard food. The controls are at the back of unit, and juice drips from the spout after juicing. As well, their juice jugs can be awkward to pour from. The **Healthstart** took five minutes to make green juice, and the **Oscar** took seven minutes, and about four minutes for apple and carrot juice.

The **Hurom HG Elite**, **Omega VRT,** and **BioChef Atlas** also have narrow chutes, so you have to cut food into small pieces. Assembly and disassembly can be fiddly, pulp can build around the filter and auger, stopping the processing.

The **Hippocrates Plus 1305** is heavy and very slow at processing leafy greens – it took more than 10 minutes to make green juice, and over five minutes for carrot juice. It comes with many parts and accessories that need to be stored, and some are fiddly to align correctly when you're assembling it. It also has the smallest juice jug, and its very narrow chute needs food to be cut into very small pieces. Juice splashes onto the bench during processing, and pulp and juice can rise up out of the chute during processing.

			FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS				
Quality of juice	Apple juice after 48h	Chute size	Pulp container	Dishwasher safe	Puree capability	Number of speeds	Weight (kg)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Juice jug capacity (mL)	Contact
Smooth and frothy	Clear pale amber juice, no froth	Excellent	Outside	✓(A)		2	4.3	42 x 21 x 43	1000	breville.com.au
Smooth and frothy	Clear dark amber juice, a little froth	Very good	Outside			2	4.5	41 x 20 x 40	1000	sunbeam.com.au
Smooth and frothy	Clear pale amber juice, no froth	Very good	Inside	✓(A)		1	3.6	41 x 25 x 36	800	breville.com.au
Pulp, no froth	Cloudy amber juice, a little froth	Very good	Outside		✓	1 (B)	6.8	47 x 23 x 21	1000	kuvings.net.au
Smooth and frothy	Clear pale amber juice, no froth	Very good	Inside	✓(A)		1	4.5	34 x 17 x 37	1250	philips.com.au
Smooth and frothy	Clear pale amber juice, no froth	Ok	Outside			1	2.1	29 x 23 x 17	na	sunbeam.com.au
Smooth and frothy	Clear dark amber juice, a little froth	Very good	Outside	✓(A)		1	6.7	44 x 31 x 23	900	au.russellhobbs.com
Pulp, no froth	Cloudy amber juice, a little froth	Very good	Outside			1 (B)	6.8	45 x 28 x 22	1000	sunbeam.com.au
Pulp, no froth	Cloudy amber juice, with froth	Narrow	Outside			1 (B)	6.6	42 x 23 x 18	1000	breville.com.au
Pulp, no froth	Cloudy amber juice, with froth	Very narrow	Outside		✓	1 (B)	5.9	41 x 18 x 41	1000	vitality4life.com.au/
Pulp, no froth	Cloudy amber juice, no froth	Very narrow	Outside		✓	1 (B)	5.7	41 x 25 x 15	1000	hurom.com.au
Pulp, no froth	Cloudy amber juice, with froth	Narrow	Outside			1 (B)	6.1	43 x 25 x 17	800	zestybynature.com
Pulp, no froth	Cloudy amber juice, with froth	Very narrow	Outside		✓	1 (B)	6.2	42 x 28 x 11	800	vitality4life.com.au/
Pulp, no froth	Cloudy amber juice, a little froth	Narrow	Outside		✓	1 (B)	4.0	42 x 16 x 29	800	tohealth.com.au
Pulp, no froth	Cloudy amber juice a little froth	Very narrow	Outside		✓	1 (B)	6.7	41 x 14 x 40	700	greenpowerjuicers.com.au

will stay in the cupboard, so we've given ease of use a higher weighting. **Ease of use** is based on the general ease of juicing, and how small the pieces have to be to fit into the chute (50%), the ease of assembly and **time** is the average time taken to juice 1kg of produce for each juicing test. Note that some juicers struggled with leafy greens and took significantly more time than the average – see About the rest , above, for details. makes. Fast centrifugal juicers tend to produce frothier, more aerated juice with little pulp, whereas slow juicers produce pulpier juice with less aeration and frothiness. Which one you prefer is a matter of personal taste. juice. But all manufacturers (including those of slow juicers) advise that juice should be drunk as soon as possible to maximise the amount, and quality of the nutrients you consume. **Weight** does not include the juice jug. dishwasher safe top shelf only **(B)** One speed plus reverse. **na** Not applicable.

Nutshell

- Spray coverage varies widely between brands, affecting how trigger happy you need to be to get good coverage and results.
- The top performers are heavy on scent, but there are good performers for sensitive noses.

Trigger happy

It's as simple as spray and wipe, but with so much choice, which multi-purpose cleaner do you choose? **Martha Psiroukis** finds out

We bought 28 multi-purpose spray cleaners and tested them for greasy dirt removal and to find which products were less likely to leave a dull film over surfaces. We also calculated their delivery dose and spray area – in other words, their value for money. Not surprisingly, their spray coverage varied significantly, and so did their cost per squirt. We found that for a square metre, you may need to pull the trigger anywhere from 12 to 56 times – a huge variation. Of course, you don't have to cover the whole area with cleaning fluid – spreading the cleaner with a damp cloth or sponge is the way to do it. But products in our What to Buy list are likely to need less coverage to get good results compared to ones lower in the table.

	COSTS	
	Price ($)	Cost (cents/ spray)
Citro Clean Multi-Purpose Cleaner	9.74	1.5
Diggers Multi-Purpose Surface Cleaner with Natural Scented Methylated Spirits Lemon	4.20	0.6
Mr Muscle Windex Surface & Glass Multi-Purpose Cleaner	3.99	0.8
Safe4u Vanilla Fresh Fridge and Kitchen Wipe	4.74	1.3
Ecostore Citrus Multipurpose Cleaner	6.99	2.1
Glitz Spray On Wipe Off Multi-Purpose	2.98	0.9
Mr Muscle Multi-Purpose Antibacterial	3.99	0.8
Aware Sensitive Low Allergy Multi-Surface Cleaner Planet Ark	3.94	1.1
Selleys Super Kleen Sugar Soap Citrus Fresh	6.22	0.8
Simple Green All-Purpose Cleaner Orange Scent Ready to Use	5.39	0.7
Coles 4-in-1 Multi-Purpose Cleaner Eucalyptus	3.00	0.6
Earth Choice Multi-Purpose Natural Clean	3.20	0.5
Earthwise Multi-Surface Cleaning Spray Citrus and Mint	3.99	1.1
Food Works Best Buy Multi-Purpose Cleaner	2.49	0.2
Uniquely Natural Multi-Purpose Cleaner	5.99	0.8
Easy-Off Bam Grease & Sparkle Power Cleaner	5.99	1.8
Nifti Hardworking All-Purpose Cleaner	4.29	1.1
Oz Kleen Mint Kleen Multipurpose Cleaner	4.99	1.3
EucoClean Naturals Indoor and Outdoor Cleaner Citronella & Rosemary	6.49	1.1
Home Brand Woolworths Multi-Purpose Cleaner Lemon	1.89	0.2
Jif Easy Lift Ocean Multipurpose	6.65	1.1
Ajax Spray n' Wipe Multi-Purpose Lavender and Citrus	3.00	0.8
Orange Power Multi-Purpose Cleaner Planet Ark	4.79	1.0
Select Woolworths Multi-Purpose Apple	2.96	0.8
Dettol Power & Pure Multi-Purpose with Active Oxygen	4.25	1.2
Pine O Cleen Multi-Purpose Fresh Eucalyptus	3.99	0.7
Powerforce Aldi Multi-Purpose Cleaner Lavender	1.89	0.2
Coles Smart Buy Multi-Purpose Cleaner	1.89	0.4

WHAT TO BUY

Prices listed are cost per squirt.

88%
Citro Clean
Multi-Purpose Cleaner

87%
Diggers
Multi-Purpose Surface Cleaner with Natural Scented Methylated Spirits Lemon

83%
Mr Muscle
Windex Surface & Glass Multi-Purpose Cleaner

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

	PERFORMANCE						SPECIFICATIONS		
Overall score (%)	Soil removal (%)	Gloss retention (%)	Spray area (cm2)	Average dose (ml)	Size (mL)	Sprays per bottle	Fragrance	Origin	Contact
88	80	96	325	0.75	500	667	Strong orange	Australia	citroclean.com.au
87	73	100	457	0.74	500	676	Strong alcohol and lemon	ns	recochem.com.au
83	68	99	325	0.97	750	773	Ammonia/Windex	Australia	scjohnson.com.au
82	64	100	818	1.39	500	360	Very strong sweet vanilla	Australia	safe4u.net.au
79	61	98	464	1.48	500	338	Light citrus	New Zealand	ecostore.com.au
78	63	94	473	1.45	500	345	Slight citrus	China	pascoes.com.au
77	60	93	228	0.97	500	515	Light floral	Australia	scjohnson.com.au
76	62	90	642	1.42	500	352	Slight citrus odour	Australia	awareenvironmental.com.au
76	64	88	401	0.97	750	773	Ozonic/citrus	ns	selleys.com.au
76	57	95	716	1.31	946	722	Light orange	USA	simplegreen.com
75	55	94	472	1.00	500	500	Strong eucalyptus	Malaysia	coles.com.au
75	55	94	459	0.93	600	645	Fruity	Australia	naturesoroganics.com.au
75	59	91	689	1.42	500	352	Dettol	New Zealand	earthwise.co.nz
75	67	83	352	0.75	750	1000	Citrus/mostly floral	Australia	foodworks.com.au
74	56	91	323	0.67	500	746	Citrus	Australia	uniquelynatural.com.au
73	56	90	521	1.48	500	338	Ozonic/slight floral	Indonesia	easyoffbam.com.au
73	54	92	462	1.28	500	391	Ammonia/fresh green	Australia	colgate.com.au
73	61	85	335	1.28	500	391	Mint	Australia	ozkleen.com
72	57	87	529	1.29	750	581	Very strong citronella/ rosemary	Australia	eucoclean.com.au
72	55	89	315	0.83	750	904	Green/citrus (slightly grassy)	Australia	woolworths.com.au
72	56	88	300	1.29	750	581	Strong ozonic	Italy	unilever.com.au
71	54	88	453	1.28	500	391	Mild floral	Australia	colgate.com.au
71	56	86	679	1.54	750	487	Orange	Australia	orangepower.com.au
71	50	92	314	1.31	500	382	Apple	Australia	woolworths.com.au
68	47	89	355	1.47	500	340	Ozonic	Poland	dettol.com.au
64	45	82	349	1.39	750	540	Floral eucalyptus	China	pineocleen.com.au
63	57	70	178	0.85	750	882	Floral lavender	Australia	aldi.com.au
60	48	71	539	1.40	750	536	Citrus	Australia	coles.com.au

82%
Safe4u
Vanilla Fresh Fridge and Kitchen Wipe

WORTH CONSIDERING

For those with sensitive noses, these are good performers, but not as strong smelling as the top performers.

Ecostore Citrus Multi-Purpose Cleaner **2.1c**
Glitz Spray On Wipe Off Multi-Purpose.....**0.9c**
Mr Muscle Multi-Purpose Antibacterial **0.8c**
Aware Sensitive Low Allergy Multi-Surface Cleaner Planet Ark....**1.1c**

Price This is the price we paid in September 2014. **Cost** per spray is based on the price paid for the packet size purchased. **Overall score** is calculated from the soil removal and gloss retention scores, equally weighted. Soil removal is a measure of how much greasy dirt is removed from white tiles covered in plastic film using a mechanical scrubbing arm with a clean, damp sponge through a set number of cycles. We use a spectrophotometer to measure the colour of the tile before soiling and after cleaning. **Gloss retention** is a measure of reflectance off black tiles before and after spraying and wiping off each cleaner. The **spray area** is the approximate area each shot delivers. The **average dose** is what's delivered in each spray. **ns** Not stated.

Sticking it out

It could be time to pick up a lightweight yet powerful stick vac, says **Kim Gilmour**

Nutshell

- We test 25 stick vacs priced from $59 to $599, and recommend six newly tested models.
- One model picks up dirt just as well as top-performing standard vacuums.

When you need to clean up crumbs and other dry spills in a hurry, a stick vacuum can do the job. Designed to be used for just a few minutes at a time, stick vacs are typically cordless and have a short battery life before they need to be recharged – but their small footprint and decent performance means they're now a hugely popular option around the home. To see if stick vacs can really rival their standard-sized cousins for performance, we've tested 11 new models, including one corded variety.

Quick sticks

We've introduced a 'quick clean' test for all our vacuums. The usual test involves measuring how much dirt is picked up after 10 passes of the cleaning head up and down the carpet; the 'quick clean' score measures pick-up after four passes. To ensure fair comparison with previous tests, we haven't incorporated these results into our overall score yet, but we'll do so in the future. Scores for quick-clean performance tend to be lower as the vacs don't pick up as much dirt in those first passes, but the Bosch Athlet and the Miele are still OK at quick cleaning.

Kogan rechargeable vacuum cleaner KAVAC21RECA

We tested Kogan's stick vac but cannot recommend it because, despite numerous attempts, we could not remove the dirt receptacle from its motor housing to empty it. It was out of stock when we tried to buy another one for retesting. Full results can be found at **choice.com.au/stickvacs**

	Price ($)	PERFORMANCE Overall score (%)
CORDED		
• **Miele** S192 (A)	399	86
CORDLESS		
• **Bosch** Athlet BCH6AT25AU	449	81
Dyson DC 44 Animal	549	81
Dyson DC 59	599	80
Bissell AirRAM Cordfree #1047-F	399	78
• **Electrolux** Ergorapido Lithium 2in1 ZB3012	298	78
• **Electrolux** Ergorapido 2in1 ZB3004	249	78
• **Hoover** Linx Cordless HLXUP001	399	77
Dyson DC35 Multi Floor Stick Vac	459	76
Electrolux Ergorapido ZB2932	199	76
Rowenta Air Force Extreme RH8753	220	75
Electrolux Ultrapower Plus ZB5012	399	74
• **Hoover** Athen ATN252LI 013	349	73
Hoover Freejet 19.2V Powerful	199	72
• **Bissell** Lift-Off 2-in-1 3396	199	68
Hoover Heritage 5210	179	68
• **Airflo** Power Vac AFV9012	199	66
• **Piranha** 2in1 Stick Vac 900381	99	66
Homemaker 2-in-1 (NK-165)	59	64
• **Vax** Atractivo VST144VL	199	62
Cleanstar CSV001	199	61
Bosch Move 2-in-1 BBHMOVE1AU	199	55
Bosch Move 2-in-1 BBHMOVE4AU	249	54
Dirt Devil DDST6V	79	52
• **Home Hero** Rechargeable 12V Stick Vac U025	99	45

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of October 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of hard floor dirt pick-up (30%), ease of use (30%), cleaning corners and edges (15%), pet hair removal (15%) and dirt removal from carpet (10%). All models scored 100% in the scratch test. **Noise** For comparison, a typical conversation is carried out at roughly 60dB, while city traffic is measured at around 80dB. **Measured running time** At full power, where available. **TABLE NOTES (A)** The Miele S192 is a corded stick vacuum and dust bags are required • Newly tested **na** Not applicable **ns** Not stated **nt** Not tested

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Battery life Cordless models run 6–40 min at full power.
2-in-1 models Many stick vacs have a detachable handheld vacuum for tricky jobs like cleaning a car's floor (see table; not part of overall score).
Charging time Look for models that run for a useful length of time and don't take long to charge.

Ease of use Try before you buy to see if the stick vac is light and easy to manoeuvre over both carpet and hard surfaces.
Variable power Being able to lower the suction is handy when cleaning delicate fabric such as curtains.
Filter Should be easy to remove and clean or replace.
Tools A dusting brush and/or crevice and upholstery tools are handy. On-board storage makes them easy to access.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

									FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS							
Hard floor dirt pick up performance (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Cleaning corners and edges (%)	Pet hair removal score (%)	Dirt removal from carpet score (%)	Quick cleaning test score on carpet (%)	Car cleaning score 2-in-1 models (%)	Noise (dBA)	Measured running time (min)	Carpet or hard floor head/ brush head	Crevice/ upholstery tool/ dusting brush	On-board storage	Handheld as well?	Telescopic wand	Speed settings	Claimed charging time (h)	Battery voltage (V)	Battery type	Measured dust collector volume (L)	Weight (kg)	Country of origin	Contact
100	71	90	100	63	58	90	72	na	✓/✓	✓/✓/-	-	✓	-	2	na	na	na	1.1 (A)	4.7	China	miele.com.au
90	64	80	100	79	68	na	71	10	-/✓	-/-/-	na	-	-	3	6	25.2	Li-ion	0.4	3.4	China	bosch.com.au
80	80	75	100	63	nt	90	78	9	-/✓	✓/✓/✓	-	✓	-	2	5.5	22.2	Li-ion	0.4	2.3	Malaysia	dyson.com.au
80	80	70	100	67	nt	90	81	6	-/✓	✓/✓/✓	-	✓	-	2	3.5	21.6	Li-ion	0.4	2.1	Malaysia	dyson.com.au
93	64	78	100	46	nt	na	76	33	-/✓	-/-/-	na	-	-	1	4	22.2	Li-Ion	0.3	3.5	China	bissell.com.au
80	71	80	100	58	48	70	70	12	-/✓	✓/-/✓	✓	✓	-	2	4	18.0	Li-ion	0.4	2.5	China	electrolux.com.au
80	71	80	100	57	46	70	70	11	-/✓	✓/-/✓	✓	✓	-	2	14	14.4	NiMH	0.4	2.6	China	electrolux.com.au
100	67	45	100	54	40	na	75	14	-/✓	-/-/-	na	-	-	2	3	18.0	Li-ion	0.5	3.4	China	hoover.com.au
77	70	78	100	53	nt	70	78	9	-/✓	✓/✓/✓	✓	✓	-	2	3.5	22.2	Li-ion	na	2.2	Malaysia	dyson.com.au
80	68	75	100	50	nt	60	69	12	-/✓	✓/-/✓	-	✓	-	2	16	12.0	NiMH	na	2.6	China	electrolux.com.au
83	66	64	100	57	nt	na	68	20	-/✓	-/-/-	na	-	-	3	10	18.0	NiMH	0.6	3.7	China	rowenta.com.au
77	65	73	100	59	nt	na	67	17	-/✓	-/-/-	na	-	-	3	24	25.2	Li-ion	0.5	3.0	Hungary	electrolux.com.au
90	68	35	100	55	38	na	74	17	-/✓	-/-/-	na	-	-	2	24	25.2	Li-ion	0.5	2.9	China	hoover.com.au
80	75	58	90	36	nt	60	71	25	-/✓	✓/-/✓	-	✓	-	1	ns	19.2	NiMH	na	2.9	China	hoover.com.au
70	78	50	90	28	20	40	67	13	-/✓	✓/-/-	✓	✓	-	1	16	12.0	ns	0.3	2.5	China	bissell.com.au
83	71	30	100	18	nt	70	70	25	-/✓	✓/✓/✓	-	✓	-	1	8	14.4	NiMH	na	3.0	China	hoover.com.au
63	74	55	100	17	10	70	70	22	-/✓	✓/-/✓	-	✓	-	1	ns	14.4	ns	0.2	2.1	China	airflo.com.au
63	74	55	100	17	11	70	67	20	-/✓	✓/-/✓	-	✓	-	1	15	12.0	ns	0.2	2.2	China	hegroup.com.au
63	77	35	100	22	nt	70	72	20	-/✓	✓/-/✓	-	✓	-	1	16	12.0	NiMH	0.5	2.6	China	kmart.com.au
47	71	65	100	20	12	70	75	17	-/✓	✓/-/-	✓	✓	-	1	11	14.4	NiMH	0.4	2.8	China	vax.com.au
70	76	55	50	19	nt	20	71	18	-/✓	✓/-/-	✓	✓	-	1	12	12.0	NiMH	na	2.6	China	cleanstar.com.au
43	74	15	100	22	nt	20	69	25	-/✓	✓/-/-	-	✓	-	1	16	14.4	NiMH	0.4	2.7	China	bosch.com.au
37	74	60	60	23	nt	20	74	30	-/✓	✓/-/-	-	✓	-	2	16	18.0	NiMH	na	2.9	China	bosch.com.au
53	60	50	60	19	nt	20	70	15	-/✓	-/-/-	na	✓	✓	1	14	6.0	Lead acid	0.6	2.9	China	dirtdevil.com.au
30	67	42	50	23	11	40	71	7	-/✓	-/-/✓	✓	✓	-	1	14	12.0	ns	0.3	2.6	China	godfreys.com.au

WHAT TO BUY

86%
Miele S192 (corded)

$399

Good points
- Excellent at cleaning hard floors, corners and around edges
- Excellent at cleaning up sand and pebbles from a car's floor
- Good controls

Bad points
- Only OK at picking up dirt from carpet
- The cleaning head is tiring to move over carpet

81%
Bosch Athlet BCH6AT25AU

$449

Good points
- Dirt pickup performance is on par with the top performing standard vacs
- Excellent at cleaning hard floors
- Very good at cleaning corners and around edges
- Good controls

Bad points
- The cleaning head is tiring to move over carpet

78%
Electrolux Ergorapido 2in1 ZB3004

$249

Good points
- Very good at cleaning hard floors
- Very good at cleaning corners and around edges
- Removable handheld
- Good at cleaning up sand and pebbles from a car's floor
- Excellent controls

Bad points
- Only OK at picking up dirt from carpet

78%
Electrolux Ergorapido Lithium 2in1 ZB3012

$298

Good points
- Very good at cleaning hard floors, corners and around edges
- Removable handheld
- Good at cleaning sand and pebbles from a car's floor
- Excellent controls

Bad points
- Only OK at picking up dirt from carpet

77%
Hoover Linx Cordless HLXUP001

$399

Good points
- Excellent at cleaning hard floors
- Excellent controls

Bad points
- Borderline at picking up dirt from carpet
- Poor at cleaning corners and around edges

73%
Hoover Athen ATN252LI 013

$349

Good points
- Excellent at cleaning hard floors
- Good controls

Bad points
- Only OK at picking up dirt from carpet
- Poor at cleaning corners and around edges ■

About the rest

Both the **Airflo** and **Bissell Lift-Off 2-in-1** are excellent at removing pet hair (as are all recommended models here), include handheld cleaners, and are easy to control. But when picking up dirt from carpet, the Bissell is poor and the Airflo very poor. The **Home Hero** has a removable handheld and excellent controls, but performed poorly overall. The **Vax** is excellent at removing pet hair and has good controls, but is very poor at picking up dirt from carpet.

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

81% Dyson DC 44 Animal (Nov 13)	$549
80% Dyson DC 59 (Nov 13)	$599
78% Bissell AirRAM Cordfree (Nov 13)	$399
76% Dyson DC35 Multi-Floor (Oct 12)	$459
76% Electrolux Ergorapido ZB2932 (Oct 12)	$199
75% Rowenta Air Force Extreme RH8753 (Nov 13)	$220
74% Electrolux Ultrapower Plus ZB5012 (Nov 13)	$399

Month and year indicates issue where each was first profiled.

Upsizing your mobile

Big and bigger is the name of the game for the latest smartphones, says **Denis Gallagher**, and Apple has finally come to the large-screen party

Apple helped define the smartphone for the average consumer with the release of the iPhone 3G in 2008. However, while the original iPhone's 3.5-inch display was considered large for a mobile phone at the time, the display on the iPhone increased by only half an inch over six years. In contrast, Android- and Windows-based mobile phones delivered larger and larger displays to accommodate its new role as an entertainment and media consumption device.

Apple finally acknowledged the change in the smartphone landscape and recently released two larger-screen smartphones in the iPhone 6 and 6 Plus. As a result, Apple has regained top spot in our latest round-up. But a range of Android models from the likes of Samsung, LG, Sony and HTC show the battle for smartphone supremacy is ongoing.

Nutshell

- We test 29 smartphones in a variety of sizes, operating systems and prices.
- Apple releases its much-anticipated iPhone 6 and 6 Plus large screen phones.

WHAT TO BUY

82%
Apple iPhone 6 (64GB)

The iPhone 6 takes its design cues from the iPad range, with a brushed aluminium case and curved edges surrounding a 4.7-inch display, delivering more screen area than the previous model. Improvements include a better camera, faster processor and upgraded iOS8 operating system for tighter integration with other Apple devices.

82%
Apple iPhone 6 Plus (64GB)

If you've decided to buy a new iPhone, the next decision is whether to go with the fairly standard-sized iPhone 6 or the significantly larger 6 Plus with 5.5-inch screen. The 6 Plus has an optical image stabiliser for the camera, which helps reduce the effect of camera movement on the final image and better battery life.

82%
Samsung Galaxy S5 (16GB)

The Galaxy S5 is Samsung's latest attempt to win the hearts and minds of smartphone users. The standard 16GB of internal memory may not be enough for most users, but the capacity can be easily increased through the use of microSD cards up to 128GB. The 5.1-inch display puts it comfortably in between the iPhone 6 and larger 'phablets'.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO BUY (cont'd)

81%
Samsung Galaxy Note 3 (64GB)

The Note 3 has a 5.7 inch screen, making it a true phablet, and not really for single-hand operation. Holding the Note 3 in one hand and using the stylus in the other creates a tablet-like user experience, but it can also be carried in a coat pocket or handbag.

80%
LG G3 (16GB)

LG's latest flagship smartphone is its best effort by far. The curved backplate makes the phone easy to hold in one hand, considering the 5.5-inch display, and the placement of the power and volume controls on the backplate either side of the camera lens becomes surprisingly natural after prolonged use.

The term 'phablet', a combination of phone and tablet, has been used to define the latest range of giant phones. However, an acronym such as BAP ('big-ass phone') may be more appropriate as the latest models strain the seams on our back pockets, if not our wallets.

	PERFORMANCE																FEATURES			
	Price ($)	Overall score	Internet score (%)	Reception score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Email score (%)	Camera score (%)	Music score (%)	Video score (%)	Handling score (%)	Touchscreen score (%)	SMS score (%)	GPS score (%)	Synchronisation score (%)	Display score (%)	Durability score (%)	Time in use 3G (h:min, claimed)	Standby time 3G (days, claimed)	4G	NFC (near field communication)
Apple iPhone 6	999	82	87	81	70	92	75	86	90	83	81	93	66	70	93	76	14:00	10	✓	✓(A)
Apple iPhone 6 Plus	1129	82	94	76	74	92	76	86	90	83	81	79	69	70	97	76	24:00	16	✓	✓(A)
Samsung Galaxy S5	799	82	95	72	75	92	73	83	68	76	92	93	71	80	90	82	21:00	16	✓	✓
Samsung Galaxy Note 3	899	81	95	54	68	92	79	86	78	84	92	93	70	80	94	78	21:00	18	✓	✓
LG G3	729	80	89	62	74	92	68	83	70	89	91	93	69	80	80	70	21:00	23	✓	✓
Apple iPhone 5c	529	78	81	59	77	84	76	87	87	76	87	93	61	70	85	70	10:00	10	✓	
Apple iPhone 5s	749	78	81	44	79	84	80	87	92	77	87	93	62	70	85	77	10:00	10	✓	
HTC One M8	799	78	89	72	79	76	59	76	77	84	92	93	71	80	86	77	20:00	21	✓	✓
Sony Xperia Z2	759	78	89	54	64	92	73	83	76	82	92	93	70	80	76	79	19:00	31	✓	✓
Nokia Lumia 1020	749	77	80	58	70	84	80	83	87	65	87	68	78	80	88	85	13:18	16	✓	✓
BlackBerry Z10	699	76	82	76	72	92	61	78	78	54	87	86	46	80	89	80	10:00	12	✓	✓
HTC One Max	799	76	95	51	71	84	57	80	79	84	92	79	69	80	78	63	25:00	24	✓	✓
HTC One Mini 2	499	76	82	70	72	84	58	79	55	88	91	93	65	80	83	76	16:06	23	✓	✓
Huawei Ascend P7	399	76	82	80	71	84	53	73	51	78	91	93	66	80	88	87	14:00	18	✓	✓
Nokia Lumia 1520	699	76	86	66	76	92	52	83	80	74	87	61	75	70	86	80	25:06	32	✓	✓
HTC Desire 816	399	75	89	63	76	84	57	74	74	84	76	79	59	80	75	81	21:00	31	✓	
Samsung Galaxy S5 Mini	499	75	76	75	74	76	59	83	59	81	91	93	58	80	80	83	10:00	ns	✓	✓
BlackBerry Z30	499	74	89	67	69	84	53	81	71	54	87	93	51	70	80	82	18:00	16	✓	✓
Sony Xperia Z1 Compact	599	74	82	65	70	84	58	74	47	74	92	93	59	80	81	78	18:00	28	✓	✓
HTC Desire 500	349	73	82	52	73	84	60	80	65	83	92	86	45	80	70	76	12:06	19		
Motorola Moto X	438	73	82	64	68	84	41	78	69	73	92	93	60	70	82	82	13:00	24	✓	✓
Samsung Galaxy S4 Zoom	599	73	75	50	73	76	78	86	80	83	76	72	46	80	84	78	13:00	24	✓	
HTC Desire 610	299	72	82	64	76	84	47	74	67	84	76	86	48	80	69	76	15:48	27	✓	✓
Nokia Lumia 930	599	72	80	57	72	84	58	55	83	62	91	86	78	70	86	79	17:54	18	✓	✓
Google Nexus 5	420	71	89	40	72	84	59	59	63	73	92	79	63	80	86	83	17:00	35	✓	✓
HTC Desire 601	349	71	82	41	78	84	51	76	48	85	92	86	48	80	76	86	12:48	18	✓	
Motorola Moto G	249	71	82	72	68	84	42	58	59	79	91	93	61	70	81	80	ns	ns	✓	
Sony Xperia M2	399	71	81	64	68	84	37	77	49	79	81	93	55	80	77	74	12:12	27	✓	✓
Nokia Lumia 1320	349	70	86	67	65	84	38	72	58	69	87	61	63	70	82	75	21:00	28	✓	

ABOUT THE REST

The **iPhone 5S** and **5C** are now the only option for Apple fans who don't want to move to the larger 4-inch plus screens. Android phones at various sizes, prices and capacities dominate our test, with **HTC** presenting a range of options from the premium **One M8** through to the more affordable **Desire** series. **Samsung** is the highest-selling smartphone maker with several model options available including the **Galaxy S5 Mini** (still larger than the iPhone 5S/5C) and the unique **Galaxy S4 Zoom**, with a 10X optical zoom lens (making it a good option for photo enthusiasts).

The **Xperia Z2** is the flagship smartphone from **Sony**, with the smaller **Z1 Compact** or more entry level **Xperia M2** offering a range of options and prices.The large-screen **Huawei Ascend P7** and HTC Desire 816 are among the cheapest Androids tested, but if you're looking for more screen for your dollar, check out the **Nokia Lumia 1320** with a 6-inch display running Windows Phone 8.1 for $349. If you want the same size screen but more resolution and faster processor, then the **Nokia Lumia 1520** is available but at twice the price. Windows Phone 8.1 fans also have the smaller **Nokia Lumia 1020** with its 38-Mp camera, or the 5-inch **Nokia Lumia 930**.

Motorola makes a return to the smartphone market with the mid-range **Moto X** and entry-level **Moto G.** The popular **Google Nexus 5** remains one of the best value Androids, though it's soon to be replaced by the even larger 6-inch Google Nexus 6.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

		SPECIFICATIONS												
AMR-WB (HD voice quality)	Memory card slot	Internal memory – total (GB)	Internal memory – accessible (GB)	Maximum memory (GB)	Battery capacity (mAh)	Operating system	App marketplace	Screen resolution (px x px)	Display size (in)	Specific absorption rate (SAR) W/kg	Weight (g)	SIM type	Contact
✓		64	55.6	63	1809	iOS8	AS	750 x 1334	4.7	0.98	129	Nano	apple.com.au
✓		64	55.6	63	2906	iOS8	AS	1080 x 1920	5.5	0.99	174	Nano	apple.com.au
✓	✓	16	10.7	140	2800	A	G	1080 x 1920	5.1	0.56	144	Micro	samsung.com.au
✓	✓	64	55.7	90	3200	A	G	1080 x 1920	5.7	0.36	167	Micro	samsung.com.au
✓	✓	16	11.2	140	3000	A	G	1440 x 2560	5.5	0.29	156	Micro	lg.com.au
✓		8	6.5	7	1510	iOS7	AS	640 x 1136	4	1	132	Nano	apple.com.au
✓		16	14.5	15	1560	iOS7	AS	640 x 1136	4	1	113	Nano	apple.com.au
✓	✓	16	10.5	139	2600	A	G	1080 x 1920	5	0.42	158	Nano	htc.com/au
✓	✓	16	11.5	140	3200	A	G	1080 x 1920	5.2	0.71	164	Micro	sony.com.au
✓		32	29.1	29	2000	W8	W	768 x 1280	4.4	0.76	158	Micro	nokia.com.au
✓	✓	16	16.0	43	1800	B10	B	768 x 1280	4.2	0.99	136	Micro	au.blackberry.com/business
✓	✓	32	24.0	75	3300	A	G	1080 x 1920	5.9	1.29	220	Micro	htc.com/au
✓	✓	16	10.8	139	2110	A	G	720 x 1280	4.5	1.46	136	Nano	htc.com/au
✓	✓	16	11.7	44	2530	A	G	1080 x 1920	5	0.52	124	Micro	consumer.huawei.com/au
✓	✓	32	29.1	93	3400	W8	W	1080 x 1920	6	0.64	210	Nano	nokia.com.au
✓	✓	8	4.5	132	2600	A	G	720 x 1280	5.5	0.26	163	Nano	htc.com/au
✓	✓	16	11.7	76	2100	A	G	720 x 1280	4.5	0.97	120	Micro	samsung.com.au
✓	✓	16	11.0	75	2880	B10	B	720 x 1280	5	0.97	171	Micro	au.blackberry.com/business
✓	✓	16	11.7	76	2300	A	G	720 x 1280	4.3	0.74	136	Micro	sony.com.au
✓	✓	4	3.1	65	1800	A	G	480 x 800	4.3	0.52	125	Micro	htc.com/au
✓		16	11.8	12	2200	A	G	720 x 1280	4.6	1.21	133	Nano	motorola.com.au
✓	✓	8	5.1	69	2330	A	G	540 x 960	4.3	0.2	208	Micro	samsung.com.au
✓	✓	8	4.2	132	2040	A	G	540 x 960	4.7	0.45	145	Nano	htc.com/au
✓		32	29.1	29	2420	W8	W	1080 x 1920	5	0.73	165	Nano	nokia.com.au
✓		16	11.7	13	2300	A	G	1080 x 1920	5	0.49	130	Micro	google.com.au/nexus/5
✓	✓	8	6.5	69	2100	A	G	540 x 960	4.5	0.53	129	Micro	htc.com/au
✓	✓	8	5.5	38	2070	A	G	720 x 1280	4.5	1.24	143	Micro	motorola.com.au
✓	✓	8	4.9	37	2330	A	G	540 x 960	4.8	0.78	148	Micro	sony.com.au
✓	✓	8	7.3	71	3400	W8	W	720 x 1280	6	0.46	224	Micro	nokia.com.au

USING THE TABLE All phones tested have a 3.5mm headset socket; micro USB PC connection that can also charge the phone (except the Apple iPhone models using a proprietary Lightning connection); quad-band GSM support as well as support for the 2100MHz 3G band; hands-free talk mode and a capacitive touchscreen. All models tested support HD voice and HD video capture. **Price** Recommended retail, as of November 2014. You can get most of these phones except the Apple iPhones for less by shopping around. **Scores** The overall score is made up of: internet (15%), reception (10%), calling sound quality (10%), email (10%), camera (10%), music (10%), video (5%), handling (5%), touchscreen (5%), SMS (5%), GPS (5%), PC sync (5%), display (2.5%) and durability (2.5%). **Smartphone operating system** P = Windows Phone 8, A = Android 4 or greater, iOS7 = Apple iOS 7, iOS8 = Apple iOS 8, B10 = BlackBerry OS 10. **App marketplace** W8 = Windows 8 Phone Store, AS = App Store, G = Google Play, B = Blackberry Store. **TABLE NOTES (A)** NFC functionality for contactless payments only; not for use with NFC devices **ns** Not stated.

Sound investment

Which soundbars hit all the high notes for under $1000? Chris Ruggles finds out

Nutshell

- Soundbars are a practical way to get better sound than most TVs can deliver.
- We've tested 17 models, 14 of them new, and recommend one.

The sound coming directly from your TV will rarely lift you from your lounge and transport you into a film or TV show. For great sound, you normally need speakers placed strategically around the room. But if that's not practical, or it's a bit aesthetically challenging, a soundbar might just be the solution to your problem.

Soundbars are a compromise, so don't expect them to deliver cinema-quality sound. But they can deliver good sound, and they're a really practical solution for smaller rooms. Big rooms will require a lot more power than most soundbars can manage, so they tend to sound like an under-powered single speaker when there are no close walls to bounce sound off of.

Tip

To find the best spot for your subwoofer, first put it where you normally sit and then move around the room until you find where it sounds best. That's where you should set it up for the best result.

	COST	PERFORMANCE					FEATURES	
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Listening panel (%)	Ease of use (%)	Remote control (%)	Standby energy (%)	Wall mountable / hardware included	Wireless subwoofer
JBL Center Cinema SB400	999	70	76	59	60	60	✓/✓	✓
• **Samsung** HW-H450	349	64	67	81	40	60	✓/✓	✓
• **LG** NB3540	399	62	64	76	40	60	✓/✓	✓
• **Panasonic** SC-HTB880	989	62	66	57	50	60	✓/✓	✓
• **Sony** HT-ST3	899	62	65	60	40	100	✓/	
• **Yamaha** YAS-103	299	62	59	73	50	100	✓/	(A)
• **Panasonic** SC-HTB680	549	61	66	66	50	20	✓/✓	✓
• **Harman** Kardon SB 26	899	60	69	57	30	40	✓/✓	✓
• **Klipsch** R-10B	1099	59	64	69	30	60	✓/	✓
• **Yamaha** YSP-1400	799	59	52	73	60	100	✓/	(A)
• **Denon** DHT-S514	999	58	59	75	40	60	✓/	✓
• **LG** NB5540	749	58	58	75	40	60	✓/✓	✓
• **Samsung** HW-H751	899	58	61	81	40	0	✓/✓	✓
• **Sony** HT-CT60BT	249	58	60	54	40	100	✓/	
• **Pioneer** SP-SB23W	849	52	61	54	30	0	✓/	✓
Boston Acoustics Tvee 26	499	48	39	69	60	60	✓/	✓
Sonos Playbar	999	48	52	57	40	0	✓/	

USING THE TABLE Price is recommended retail as supplied by manufacturers in September 2014. The overall score is nearest 0.5cm **na** not applicable **ns** not stated

WHAT TO BUY

70%

JBL Center Cinema SB400

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Good points

- The panel liked it for surround sound movies and music, as well as stereo
- Has HDMI output for video switching
- Three HDMI inputs
- Bluetooth connectivity
- One 3.5mm input
- Can be set to respond to your TV's remote control

Bad points

- Unintuitive, poorly positioned display only gives a brief indication of status changes
- Took several attempts to sync subwoofer with soundbar
- Relatively large and weighty subwoofer

Setting up

Setting up a soundbar is generally quite straightforward, but make sure you have enough space in front of or below your TV screen (they're usually less than 15cm tall). An IR blaster (see What to look for, on page 68) is helpful where the soundbar will get in the way of the TV's remote control sensor.

If you're using a subwoofer, make sure there's enough cable length to position it for best effect. Many models use wireless connections, so it's much easier to place them anywhere in the room.

If you're attaching the soundbar to the wall, make sure all of the connections are accessible and that the cables will fit.

			SPECIFICATIONS									
IR blaster for TV control	Video switching	Subwoofer speaker orientation	HDMI inputs	Multi-channel capability / claim	Number of soundbar speaker drivers	Dimensions (cm*, H x W x D) soundbar	Dimensions (cm*, H x W x D) subwoofer	Weight (kg, soundbar)	Weight (kg, subwoofer)	Country of origin	Contact
	✓	Down	3	2.1	6	10 x 110 x 7	35.5 x 32 x 33	3.1	10.1	ns	e-hifi.com.au
		Left	1	2.1	ns	6 x 96 x 6.5	36.5 x 18 x 30	2.1	5.3	China	samsung.com.au
		Left	0	2.1	2	4 x 77.5 x 9	36.5 x 17.5 x 32	1.4	5.7	China	lg.com/au
✓	✓	Down	2	5.1	5	5.5 x 112.5 x 12.5	41 x 18 x 30.5	3.2	5.2	Malaysia	panasonic.com.au
	✓	Front	3	4.1	4	4 x 90.5 x 3.5	13.5 x 43 x 37.5	0.9	8.5	Malaysia and Vietnam	sony.com.au
		Down	0	7.1	4	11 x 89 x 10	na	4	na	Malaysia	yamahamusic.com.au
✓		Down	1	3.1	3	5.5 x 95 x 11	41 x 18 x 30.5	2.5	4.7	Malaysia	panasonic.com.au
✓	✓	Down	2	ns	6	11 x 92 x 9	36.5 x 32 x 33.6	3.4	9.2	China	ehifi.com.au
		Right	0	"virtual surround"	4	10.5 x 102 x 7.5	34 x 21 x 42.2	3.2	11.3	China	klipsch.com
		Down	0	5.1	10	10 x 100 x 14	na	4.4	na	Indonesia	yamahamusic.com.au
✓		Front	1	"full multi channel"	4	8.5 x 100.5 x 8	31.5 x 17.5 x 35	2.7	6.5	China	au.denon.com
		Front	1	4.1	4	4 x 103 x 8.5	33.5 x 30 x 30	2	7.8	China	lg.com/au
		Down	1	4.1	ns	6 x 94.5 x 12.5	39 x 31 x 31	3.5	9.9	China	samsung.com.au
		Rear	0	2.1	4	8.5 x 94 x 7	24.5 x 16.5 x 29.5	1.6	2.7	China	sony.com.au
		Down	0	ns	6	10.5 x 91.5 x 13.5	25.5 x 23 x 24	4.8	4.6	China	pioneer.com.au
		Down	0	2.1	2	8 x 80 x 7	24 x 26.5 x 28	2	3.1	ns	bostonacoustics.com
		na	0	3.0	9	14 x 90 x 8.5	na	5.3	na	ns	sonos.com.au

made up of listening panel (65%), ease of use (15%), remote control (15%) and standby energy (5%) scores. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested **(A)** Integrated into the soundbar * Dimensions rounded up to

About the rest

If you can't afford the top-scoring **JBL**, the **Samsung HW-H450** sounds good in cinema mode for 5.1 music and OK for movies, but lacks power and bass in stereo mode. The more expensive **Samsung HW-H751** is "woolly" or "muddy" according to our listening panel. Its bass isn't well integrated so you get rumbles but not much else from it and it has a very poor standby energy score. Both Samsung models are very easy to use despite having poor remotes.

The **LG NB3540** is reasonably well balanced, but sounds a bit thin at times and doesn't have a lot of bass. However, the **LG NB5540** suffers from too much bass. Overall, they're both easy to use despite their small remote controls.

The **Yamaha YAS-103** is the cheapest model in this test and is OK for stereo music, but it lacks a separate subwoofer, which means there's no low frequency in movies. It's easy to use and has an excellent standby energy score. The more expensive **Yamaha YSP-1400** also lacks bass and is unbalanced even in stereo mode.

The **Sony HT-ST3** has a very thin soundbar, which is permanently attached to the main subwoofer/control unit. The much cheaper and thicker **HT-CT60BT** is also attached, which may be a problem if the 2.9-metre cable won't allow enough distance in your set-up. Both have excellent standby energy scores, but poor remote controls.

The cheaper **Panasonic SC-HTB680** is a good choice for movies, but only OK for stereo music and has a very poor standby energy score. However, the more expensive **SC-HTB880** is the reverse; sounding good in stereo mode, but becoming harsh and tiring in cinema mode.

The **Denon DHT-S514** works well for movies according to two members of our expert panel, but one panellist said it sounded compressed for both movies and 5.1 sound. It scores OK for stereo sound and is easy to use, despite its poor remote control.

The **Klipsch R-10B** has the highest recommended retail price ($1099), but the in-store price is often well below $1000. It gets a good score for stereo music from our listening panel, but only OK for movies and 5.1 music. In stereo mode the sound is bright and balanced, but it becomes harsh and tiring with surround sound. It also has a poor remote control.

The **Harman Kardon SB 26** sounds good in surround sound mode and OK with stereo. It can be a bit harsh with high notes, and the low frequencies lack impact at times. Its poor remote control, lack of any display, and inputs on the underside – which could make it hard to use thick cables – reduce its overall score.

The **Pioneer SP-SB23W** sounds OK, but there's not much in the low frequencies and the panel thinks it emphasises the middle range too much. It has a poor remote control, poor standby energy score and there's no manual supplied.

The **Boston Acoustic Tvee 26** lacks power and sounds uneven in surround sound mode.

The **Sonos Playbar** was tested without the optional subwoofer, which would double the cost. It lacks bass, has little stereo effect and struggles with complex surround sounds. It also has a very poor standby energy score and a poor remote control.

What to look for

Connections To connect a DVD or Blu-ray player, check that the soundbar has at least one HDMI or digital audio connection (either TOSLINK or Digital RCA), as well as analog stereo inputs.

IR blaster for TV control allows you to place the soundbar in front of the TV's infrared receptor and still control your TV via its remote control.

Video switching lets you pass the video signal through the soundbar to your TV. This is only available on soundbars with HDMI connections, and reduces the number of wires running from the DVD player to the soundbar to one, with another one from the soundbar to the TV.

A **front panel display** is very handy when you want to listen to music without turning on the TV, allowing you to easily see the settings for the soundbar. Look for one that allows you to dim or turn it off when you don't need it – they can be distracting if they're too bright.

Wall mountable See the table, page 66, for those that come with a mounting kit included.

An **iPod dock** or **Bluetooth** connection is handy if you like to keep all of your music stored on a mobile device. ■

Nutshell

- We find out which noise-cancelling headphones deliver the quietest listening experience in a noisy environment.
- Most deliver on the promise, but some are much better than others.

How's the serenity?

Solitude doesn't come cheap, but your ears may thank you for some peace and quiet. **Denis Gallagher** finds out which noise-cancelling headphones will bring the serenity

You're excited about heading off on your well-deserved trip, yet you approach the airport with a sense of dread knowing what lies in store. You know the airline seats will be cramped, the food will be ordinary and the ambient noise of the cabin will drive you crazy, particularly if your flight is 15 hours or more. A good set of noise-cancelling headphones can help reduce fatigue when travelling and create a silent oasis so you arrive at your destination as refreshed as possible.

In this test we've looked at a selection of noise-cancelling headphones that are not only a godsend for travelling, but can also help reduce the white noise of daily life, such as the racket of the train or the air-con in your office.

How do they work?

There's some impressive technology in a pair of active noise-cancelling headphones when it comes to stopping unwelcome ambient noise getting to your ears.

Tiny microphones embedded in the headphone capture and analyse the wave pattern of low frequency ambient noise (generally noise created by a motor) to produce the exact opposite wave pattern. When the combined wave patterns arrive at your ears, what you're supposed to get is... silence.

WHO'S THE BOSE?

Bose has been dominating the premium active noise-cancelling market since the 1980s, starting with the first noise-cancelling headphones for air pilots. However, it seems the competition has finally caught up with – and in some cases, surpassed – Bose on the consumer front, not only for value but for performance. CHOICE tested the Bose QuietComfort 3 headphones in 2008 (after their release in 2006) and Bose has since added an inline mic cable – hardly significant innovation after nearly a decade. The QuietComfort 15 over-ear headphones in this latest test are to be replaced by the recently announced QuietComfort 25, but should still be readily available.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

HOW WE TEST

The scores in the table reflect how well each set of headphones reduces ambient noise in both active and passive modes, and their overall audio performance. We use a three-person listening panel in our tests.

WHAT TO BUY

79% Panasonic RP-HC800E

The Panasonic RP-HC800E performed well across all areas, including the active noise-cancelling tests, in which the listening panel rated it as the most effective of the sets tested. Passive noise reduction and overall listening quality is also good and the ability to work without noise cancelling turned on makes it a good choice when used in a quiet room.

There are no controls for volume or muting, or a phone mic for taking calls.

76% PSB M4U2

The PSB M4U2 scored highest with our listening panel for audio quality and scored well for active noise cancellation. Two cables are included, one for just listening to music and another with inline mic that also allows you to pause a song, take a call or skip to the next track in a playlist.

Although you still need to reach for your music player to alter the volume, the PSB M4U2 is an ideal set of cans to use on your next noisy trip.

	COST	PERFORMANCE						FEATURES								
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Active noise cancelling (NC) (%)	Listening (%)	Passive NC (%)	Ease of use (%)	Earcup type	Volume control on cable	Volume control on headphone	6.3mm adapter	Flight adapter	Smartphone controls	Inline mic	Works with NC off	Removable battery	Detachable ear pads
Panasonic RP-HC800E	279	79	83	75	73	79	Over ear				✓			✓	✓	
PSB M4U2	399	76	71	85	62	74	Over ear			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Parrot Zik (Bluetooth version)	499	73	78	70	67	58	Over ear		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Audio-Technica ATH-ANC9	299	72	81	63	70	70	Over ear			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Polk UltraFocus 8000	399	70	68	78	58	55	Over ear		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Sony MDR-1RNCMK2	499	70	63	82	55	73	Over ear	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Bose QuietComfort 15	399	69	74	66	57	75	Over ear	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Beats by Dre Studio 2.0	399	68	65	73	58	73	Over ear	✓				✓	✓			
Bose QuietComfort 3	449	68	72	66	57	60	On ear	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Monster Inspiration	399	68	69	68	58	73	Over ear	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	
Sennheiser PXC450	699	68	72	65	52	78	Over ear		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Harman Kardon NC	429	65	58	73	57	80	Over ear	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
AKG K495NC	499	64	67	64	53	61	On ear				✓			✓		✓
Sennheiser PXC250-II	299	60	57	65	45	80	On ear	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓
Blackbox M10SE	255	58	78	33	65	65	Over ear			✓	✓			✓	✓	

73%
Parrot Zik

The Parrot Zik is the only model we tested with the ability to operate as Bluetooth wireless headphones. Active noise-cancelling performance was good, as was overall audio quality. Controls for skipping back and forth between tracks, changing volume and taking an incoming call are accessed by swiping or holding the touch-sensitive pad on the headphones' can.

An app is available to further tweak audio settings to your liking.

72%
Audio-Technica ATH-ANC9

Our listening panel rated the Audio-Technica headphones just behind the Panasonic brand for active noise cancellation and passive noise isolation. However, overall audio quality wasn't as good as the other recommended models. The active noise-cancelling effect can be altered to reflect different types of ambient noise.

Included with the Audio-Technica is a standard cable and a cable with inline mic and controls.

About the rest

The **Polk UltraFocus 8000** and **Sony MDR-1RNCMK2** were among the top performers for overall audio quality; however, the active and passive noise cancelling performance wasn't as good as our recommended models.

The **Beats Studio 2.0** and **Monster Inspiration** deliver similar looks, features and performance, although the Beats, Polk and Bose models won't work without active noise cancelling on.

The **Sennheiser PXC450** is the most expensive model; it has good volume controls with clearly marked buttons. However, its passive noise isolation isn't as good as the top-performing models.

The **Harman Kardon NC** headphones are an unusual square pad design, with good listening quality performance. However, the active noise cancelling performance was only OK.

The **AKG K495NC** and **Sennheiser PXC250-II** on-ear headphones deliver similar overall performance, but the Sennheiser is much more compact and may even fit in your pocket.

All the headphones delivered at least reasonable audio quality, except the **Blackbox M10SE** headphones. Despite returning one of the better active noise-cancelling performance scores, our listening panel was universal in its assessment that the overall audio quality was poor. ■

		SPECIFICATIONS							
Detachable cable	Rechargeable battery	Battery type	Cable length (cm)	Additional cables (cm)	Carry bag	Country of origin	Weight (g)	Warranty (yrs)	Contact
✓		1x AAA	157		Semi-rigid case	Japan	270	1	panasonic.com/au
✓		2xAAA	153	154	Semi-rigid case	China	391	2	psbspeakers.com
✓	✓	Li-ion 800mA	129		Drawstring bag	China	337	2	parrot.com/au
✓		1x AAA	129	128	Semi-rigid case	China	243	1	audio-technica.com.au
✓		2xAAA	140		Semi-rigid case	China	376	1	polkaudio.com.au
✓	✓	3.7 V	154	122 / 300	Soft case	Malaysia	355	1	sony.com.au
✓		1x AAA	172	177	Semi-rigid case	China	209	1	bose.com.au
✓	✓	5V, 0.5A	135	136	Semi-rigid case	China	280	1	au.beatsbydre.com
✓	✓	3.7V, 0.2A	135	177	Semi-rigid case	China	155	1	bose.com.au
✓		2xAAA	129	129 / 127	Soft case	China	346	1	monsterproducts.com
✓		1x AAA	161		Semi-rigid case	China	321	2	en-au.sennheiser.com/
✓	✓	5V, 0.5A	143		Soft case	China	321	2	harmankardon.com
✓	✓	5V, 0.5A	124	200	Semi-rigid case	China	260	1	akg.com
		1x AAA	158		Soft case	China	108	2	en-au.sennheiser.com/
✓		1x AAA	155	155	Semi-rigid case	China	217	1	blackboxonline.com

USING THE TABLE All headphones are to be placed on the ear, not in the ear, and all deliver battery-powered active noise cancellation. All models come with a 3.5mm cable as well as a storage bag or case. **Price** Recommended retail as of November 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of active noise cancelling (45%), listening score (40%), passive noise cancelling (10%) and ease of use (5%).

Nutshell

- We test 18 brands of 175/65R14 tyres suitable for cars like the Mazda 2, Holden Barina and Honda Jazz.
- Our 'What to buys' have the best traction in wet and dry conditions.

Hitting the skids

Most tyres tested are OK on a dry road but in wet conditions the handling of some got downright nasty, says Graham Byrne

How we test

Cornering We assess how well the tyres keep the test car in a set lane at speeds of 80km/h and 85km/h in dry conditions, and 75km/h and 80km/h in wet conditions, using a right-hand corner with about a 55m radius.
Braking We measure the distance it takes to come to a complete standstill from driving speeds of 50km/h and 80km/h in both dry and wet conditions.
Rolling resistance We measure the distance it takes to roll to a stop from a starting speed of 25km/h.
Rolling noise We also carry out rolling noise measurements at the driver's left ear at 50km/h and 80km/h, on both the smooth racetrack and a road with a coarse surface.

Most drivers with any wet weather experience have felt it – that disconcerting moment when an unexpected loss of traction suddenly renders your vehicle beyond control. It can happen when you're setting off from an intersection, turning a corner a bit too fast or when you need to stop in a hurry. Car handling in wet conditions has generally improved over time, but choosing the correct tyres is still one of the most effective ways to get the best grip your car can provide, especially in inclement weather.

Our CHOICE test driver, Peter Horvath, put every set of tyres through the exact same set of tests, under identical conditions, and the differences he experienced between the best and worst performing tyres, particularly during wet cornering and braking, were glaring.

To put it in perspective: from 80km/h in wet conditions our best wet-braking performer, the Continental, stopped at an average distance of 36.4 metres. The worst, the Supercat, took an average of 48.5 metres to come to a halt. That's a whopping 12.1 metres difference, or nearly the same length as a standard government bus… Yikes!

Roll up, roll up!

Rolling resistance relates to the amount of energy needed to move a vehicle along the road. Theoretically, the lower the rolling resistance, the less fuel required. There's no consistent testing method used by manufacturers for measuring rolling resistance, or to determine how it relates to fuel economy, so we've developed our own method.

We measure the distance it takes to roll to a stop from a starting speed of 25km/h. This is completed five times and the shortest and longest measured distances are discarded. The three remaining measured distances are then averaged. The best performer for this test element, the Bridgestone and Continental rolled an average of 21 metres (14.2%) further than the worst performer, the Supercat.

ABOUT THE REST

Differences in tyre performance may not be as noticeable during everyday driving, but control in emergencies or wet weather conditions is what really counts. Some of the tyres that performed badly in our test could be downright dangerous under these circumstances.

Tip

It's worth shopping around. Even try different branches of the same store if possible. We did this for one of the big retailers and were given three different quotes for the same tyre.

TABLE NOTES Price paid per tyre Recommended retail, as of November 2014. Tyre prices can vary considerably depending on the store or where you live, so shop around. **Scores** The overall score is made up of cornering (25% dry, 25% wet), braking (20% dry, 20% wet) and rolling resistance (10%). The weighting for cornering is higher because you're more likely to take a fast corner than have to do emergency braking. **Speed/load ratings** See How to read a tyre, opposite.

IMAGE: ISTOCK PHOTO

WHAT TO BUY

CHOICE recommends tyres that score at least 70% overall and 70% for each test element.

79%
Continental ContiPremium Contact 2 E

79%
GT Radial Champiro Eco

79%
Hifly HF201

77%
Ovation Eco Vision VI-682

HOW TO READ A TYRE

Here's what **175/65R14 82H** means:

- **175** is the section width (in mm) - the distance between the tyre's exterior sidewalls.
- **65** is the tyre's profile or aspect ratio. It's the ratio between the tyre's section height and its section width – in this case, 65%.
- **R** stands for radial, the most common construction method for passenger car tyres.
- **14** refers to the diameter (in inches) of the rim the tyre should be fitted to.
- **82** is the load rating index, the maximum weight one tyre can carry (in this case, 475kg). Other examples are 86 (530kg), 89 (580kg), 94 (670kg) and 95 (690kg).
- **H** is the speed rating index which tells you the maximum speed at which the tyre can travel (in this case, 210km/h). Other examples are S (180km/h), T (190km/h), V (240km/h) and W (270km/h).

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE							SPECIFICATIONS		
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Dry cornering score (%), 80 & 85 km/h	Wet cornering score (%), 75 & 80 km/h	Dry braking score (%) 50 & 80 km/h	Wet braking score (%), 50 & 80 km/h	Rolling resistance score (%)	Speed rating	Special design	Contact
Continental ContiPremiumContact 2 E	114	79	85	70	90	70	80	T	Outside/inside	continental-tyres.com.au
GT Radial Champiro Eco	80	79	90	70	85	70	75	T	No	gtradial.com.au
Hifly HF201	66	79	85	75	90	70	70	H	No	tyremax.com.au/brands/hifly/
Ovation Eco Vision VI-682	79	77	80	70	90	70	75	H	No	ovationtyres.com.au
Yokohama BluEarth AE01	107	77	85	65	90	65	80	H	No	yokohama.com.au
Pirelli Cinturato P1	129	75	80	70	85	65	75	H	Outside/inside	pirelli.com.au
Firestone TZ700	89	74	70	65	95	70	70	H	No	bridgestonetyres.com.au/firestone
GoodYear Assurance TripleMax	149	72	85	60	80	60	80	H	No	goodyear.com.au
Michelin Energy XM2	122	72	85	65	75	60	75	H	Outside/inside	michelin.com.au
Falken Ziex ZE 912	85	71	75	65	85	55	75	H	Outside/inside	falken.com.au
Maxxis MA-P1	75	67	75	50	90	55	70	H	No	maxxistyres.com.au
Toyo NanoEnergy 3	108	67	75	55	85	50	75	H	No	toyotires.com.au
Dunlop Sp Sport 300E	137	66	70	50	90	50	75	V	No	dunloptyres.com.au
Kumho Ecowing ES01 KH27	96	64	65	45	85	55	80	T	Outside/inside	kumho.com.au
Achilles 122 Ecotech	69	63	65	45	85	55	75	H	No	achillesradial.com
Hankook Optimo K415	106	57	65	30	80	45	80	H	No	hankooktyre.com.au
Bridgestone Ecopia EP100	102	56	60	40	75	40	80	H	No	bridgestone.com.au
Supercat DT58703-1	85	56	70	35	80	35	70	H	No	bridgestonetyres.com.au/supercat

The right light

Chris Barnes reports on the bulbs that outshine the rest

Models shown L-R in order of score

These LED light bulbs were scored on their light output after an initial burn-in and again after 3500 hours – that's nearly two years' use, based on the typical five hours a day. The closer to their claimed light output (measured in lumens), the better the score. The best-scoring models were actually a bit brighter than their claim. We test six samples of each model and penalise any models whose samples burn out or fade, but none failed in this latest test.

We're now testing LED bulbs only, as they're becoming more affordable and available. While compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) are cheaper, LEDs switch on instantly, last a lot longer, are much less likely to fail from frequent on-off switching and don't contain mercury.

WHAT TO BUY

These models all have very good light output after 3500 hours of use.

86%
Megaman
LED dimmable LG1014dv2-E27-2800K, 14W, $51.00

86%
Osram
LED Star Classic A 60 LED 9W, $13.99

84%
GE Lighting
LED Snowcone A19 10.5W, $29.90

84%
LEDARE
LED 10W LED1307G10, $14.99

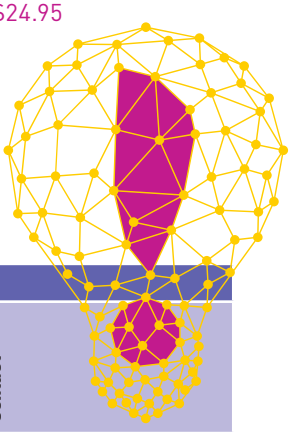
84%
Mort Bay
E27 9.5W LED 12805, $12.00

84%
Philips
LEDBulb 13W B22 8718291674153, $19.90

84%
Verbatim
Classic A E27 11W DIM 64382, $24.95

About the rest

The Everglow and Lucci are good performers and reasonably priced. The CLA, Crompton Lighting and Viribright bulbs dimmed significantly over the test, ending up 23-29% dimmer than their claimed light output. LED bulbs should not fade that quickly.



	COST	PERFORMANCE				SPECIFICATIONS				
	Price paid per bulb ($)	Overall score (%)	Initial luminosity score (%)	3500-hour luminosity score (%)	Efficiency (lm/W) after 3500h	Claimed light output (lm)	Wattage (W)	Claimed lifespan (h)	Dimmable	Contact
Megaman LED dimmable LG1014dv2-E27-2800K	51.00	86	90	80	63	810	14	25000	✓	megaman.cc
Osram LED Star Classic A 60 LED 9W	13.99	86	90	80	75	650	9	15000		osram.com.au
GE Lighting LED Snowcone A19 10.5W	29.90	84	80	80	101	900	10.5	15000		gelighting.com.au
LEDARE LED 10W LED1307G10	14.99	84	80	80	62	600	10	25000	✓	ikea.com.au
Mort Bay E27 9.5W LED 12805	12.00	84	80	80	85	806	9.5	15000		(02) 9555 9456
Philips LEDBulb 13W B22 8718291674153 (A)	19.90	84	80	80	84	1055	13	15000		philips.com.au
Verbatim Classic A E27 11W DIM 64382 (A)	24.95	84	80	80	79	810	11	30000	✓	verbatimlighting.com.au
Everglow 10W SanAn B22	27.50	76	70	70	69	850	10	30000		everglowlighting.com.au
Lucci LEDlux LED Dimmable GLS BC 120865	34.95	76	70	70	69	800	11	20000	✓	beaconlighting.com.au
CLA Longlife LED Lamp CLAL1024GE (A)	22.00	67	70	55	49	750	10	30000		clalighting.com.au
Crompton Lighting XL-LED OPAL ECO XL-ECO10ES3K (A)	29.50	67	70	55	55	730	10	30000		crompton.com.au
Viribright 10W Dimmable SL2215	19.95	67	70	55	59	820	10	25000	✓	electusdistribution.com.au

USING THE TABLE Scores Overall score is made up of the initial luminosity score (20%), 3500-hour luminosity score (60%) and failure score (20%). **Luminosity scores** are based on the light output of the lamp after 200 hours' burn-in and after 3500 hours' operation. The closer to its claimed lumens the better; the best models exceeded their claim. No models failed after 3500 hours. All are bulb shaped. **Efficiency** is a measure of light output in lumens per watt of electricity used; the larger the number, the better. **Claimed life span** is the number of hours the lamp should last in normal operation (about five hours on per day). It's an average, not the minimum you can expect from every sample. **Price per lamp** is recommended retail or what we paid in March 2014. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Discontinued but may still be in stores.

Log on to **choice.com.au/choiceextra** (see below right) for a full index from 2007 onwards. Bold type indicates a product test, member survey or user trial report. Normal type indicates a CHOICE research report. *Indicates an update, addition or correction.

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HARD WORD

Thanks this month go to Louise Hargrave-Smith, G.M. Paterson, Marilyn Cole and Hugh Smith. If you have any more examples you'd like to share with other CHOICE members, send them with your full name to The Hard Word, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the unmarked originals.
Compiled by Deirdre Smith

SNOWY MOUNTAIN HIGH

Snowy Cookies provide the problem *and* the solution with this box of munchies, available on Tiger Airways flights.

FAMINE OR FEAST?

Buy any 24 tins of cat food for just $12 – unless you want to buy any of the products pictured in the ad. They're excluded.

Big savings for happy, healthy pets
ANY 24 FOR
$12
Fancy Feast
Marinades
Fancy Feast Marinades Cat Food 85g
– Excludes Classic Recipes, Royale or A La Carte

ROUND THE TWIST

The Cucumbo spiral slicer is not suitable for use on children under nine years old. It's perfectly suitable for turning older kids into attractive salad garnishes, though.

A. Cucumbo spiral slicer
This spiral slicer will add colour to your kitchen and fun to your salads. Ideal for cucumbers and zucchini. Not suitable for children under 9 yrs.
CUCMO
$19.95
CUCUMBO

ROXIMYCIN 150
ROXITHROMYCIN 150mg
(Roxicin) Tablets
Take TWO tablets ONCE a day
TO BE TAKEN WITH OR SOON AFTER FOOD
10 tablets
THIS MEDICINE SHOULD BE TAKEN ON AN EMPTY STOMACH AT LEAST HALF AN HOUR BEFORE FOOD OR TWO HOURS AFTER FOOD

Dining dilemma

Alphapharm seems a bit confused about how soon is too soon to eat with their medication – take two tablets with food, on an empty stomach, at least two hours before eating.

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